



Eccolo Media  
2014

# B2B TECHNOLOGY CONTENT SURVEY REPORT



# ECCOLO MEDIA 2014 B2B TECHNOLOGY CONTENT SURVEY REPORT



It's been six years since we published our first annual survey that details how U.S. companies consume and apply marketing content as they purchase technology.

Today, our survey report is an essential reference point for marketers in the United States and around the world. Content marketing is now solidly established as an effective means of engaging customers and cementing trust. The Eccolo Media 2014 B2B Technology Content Survey Report has become a unique resource for technology marketers struggling to understand how content is evolving to meet increasingly complex needs.

Reflecting industry trends toward interactive and digital content design, we've chosen to deliver this year's survey on the Digarati social publishing platform. Created by Sprocket Media, an Eccolo Media partner and sponsor of this year's survey, Digarati combines a digital reader with a social reader, transforming static content into an engaging customer experience.

Content marketers have never before had more gadgets in their toolkit for connecting with customers. The *Eccolo Media 2014 B2B Technology Content Survey Report* helps to reveal how marketers can best deploy these tools for business success—in 2014 and beyond.

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→ **Welcome** to the sixth-annual *Eccolo Media 2014 B2B Technology Content Survey Report*. We've come a long way since we conducted our first survey in 2008. We've witnessed the move to mobile, the rise of social, and the ever-increasing importance of content marketing (back in 2008, the term wasn't even widely used). Through it all, Eccolo Media has been there. Our survey remains one of the few in the world that tackles the important subject of content marketing.

Our 503 respondents include managers, directors, vice presidents, C-level executives, and other key personnel at small businesses, mid-market companies, and large enterprises. All were responsible for influencing or making technology buying decisions in the six months prior to the survey.

In some cases, these buyers reinforce our previous year's findings, but in many other instances, their responses are nothing short of surprising.

### INTRODUCING NEW COLLATERAL TYPES

The universe of marketing collateral continues to expand at a rapid pace, and in an effort to keep up, we've increased the number of assets we surveyed against from five in 2008 to 16 this year. Even when faced with a wider set of choices, our respondents, as in years past, favor traditional content types. White papers, product brochures, case studies, and technology guides/implementation scenarios remain among the most consumed and influential collateral assets during a technology purchase.

### MAPPING CONTENT TO THE SALES CYCLE

For the first time, we've done more sophisticated mapping of content to the sales cycle by buyer role and by size of business. We uncover exactly which content types are consumed in which phases of the sales cycle for six distinct personas (see section, **"Content Mapped to Persona Types"**), from presales through the final sales process and even beyond.

Because content now plays a role at every stage of IT purchasing, its relevance and quality becomes paramount. Marketers who understand the phases of the sales cycle and correctly leverage content have tremendous opportunity to engage, connect, and build trust with customers like never before.

### LOOKING CLOSELY AT LINKEDIN

While IT buyers continue to rely heavily on traditional content such as white papers and case studies (no surprises there), they are increasingly finding value in an ever-expanding content universe, which includes social platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

When they access content via social platforms, their behavior doesn't quite match their expectations. We find, for example, that while 21 percent of buyers receive vendor collateral through tweets, only 6 percent expect Twitter to be a source of content.

Similarly, when asked which social channels they "have received" vendor content through, more respondents say Facebook than LinkedIn. But when asked which social channels they're "most

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likely to consume” vendor content from, LinkedIn takes the lead. In other words, technology buyers actually receive more vendor content through Facebook but perceive LinkedIn as the more likely channel to receive such content. This disconnect points to the battle of brand perception brewing between the two social media giants (see sidebar, **“Social Wars: Facebook vs. LinkedIn”**) and potentially presents opportunity to content marketers.

## INCREASING PERCEIVED INFLUENCE WITH INTERACTIVITY

Survey respondents state clearly that interactive content is perceived as more influential, and more than two-thirds say they will interact with content to receive additional information from vendors (see section, **“Interactivity in Content”**).

You can get an instant uplift in influence by building interactivity such as hyperlinks and embedded audio, video, or graphic elements into your written content and, as an added bonus, take users more deeply into your buyer’s journey. Be careful, however. The interactivity must augment, not detract from, the user experience. Buyers, for example, won’t always click a link if they’re not certain where it will take them, or whether the link is relevant.

## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF VENDOR WEB SITES

When it comes to the distribution channels through which

respondents say they’re most likely to receive vendor content, vendor Web sites tie with “forwarded from a personal contact” as the most frequently used channels (see section, **“Distribution: What’s Hot and What’s Not”**). Even better, when we ask respondents to rank the “influence” of these same distribution channels, vendor Web sites come in a respectable second in terms of imparting influence over a purchasing decision.

This aligns with one of our big beliefs: When it comes to content marketing, microsites and campaign landing pages that are well linked to vendor sites can be extraordinarily valuable.

As always, we wrap up our survey findings with best practices that marketers can apply right now to make a measurable difference in reaching and engaging technology buyers.

We hope the information presented in this year’s report helps to guide your content marketing planning and strategy, and we encourage you to leave a comment or reach out to us with your own perspectives on the *Eccolo Media 2014 B2B Technology Content Survey Report*.

Regards,



Lorie Loe  
CEO, Eccolo Media

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→ **For** three years now Eccolo Media has collaborated with market-research firm Global Marketing Insite (GMI) to identify participants for our survey. GMI distributed this year's survey in September 2013 and then returned the raw data to Eccolo Media for analysis.

## RESPONDENT PROFILES

This year's survey includes C-level executives, vice presidents, directors, managers, developers/programmers, and technicians. Of the 503 respondents, 46 percent are director level or higher, and 23 percent are C-level (Figure 1). All work for corporations in a variety of industries based in the United States; all were responsible for influencing or making technology purchasing decisions in the previous six months.

One-third of respondents identify themselves as technology-purchase influencers, while two-thirds identify as decision makers (Figure 2). Their ages range from 20 to over 60, with more than half between the ages of 30 and 50 (Figure 3).

Respondents are about equally divided among small businesses with fewer than 100 workers; mid-market organizations with 101 to 999 employees; and large enterprises with a workforce of more than 1,000 (Figure 4).

## CONTENT TYPES AND DEFINITIONS

We surveyed respondents about their consumption of the following types of content:

### RESPONDENTS BY JOB TITLE

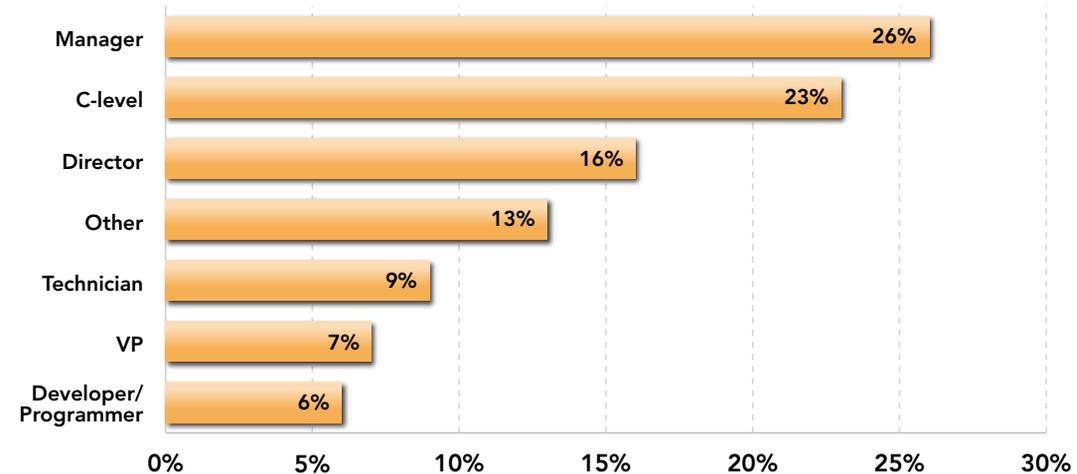
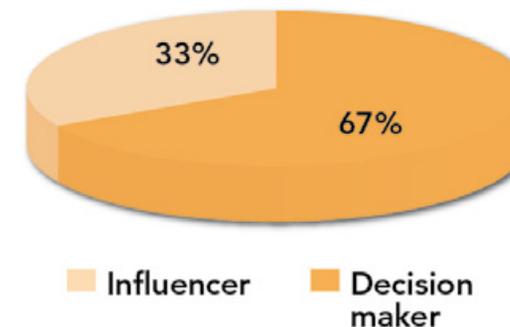


FIGURE 1: What is your job title?

### RESPONDENTS BY ROLE

FIGURE 2: Are you primarily a technology-purchase influencer or decision maker?



### RESPONDENTS BY AGE

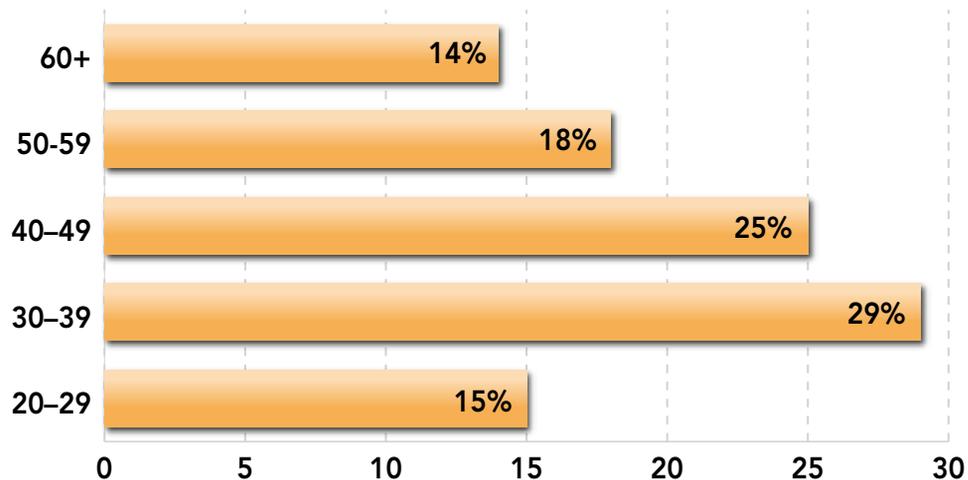


FIGURE 3: What is your age?

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- **White papers** provide analysis of technology or business issues and trends from a largely independent, vendor-neutral perspective.
- Product brochures/data sheets** deliver product, service, or vendor information.
- Case studies/success stories** feature detailed depictions of how customers deploy a vendor's products or services.
- Detailed technology guides/implementation scenarios** provide in-depth descriptions of product features and functionality, or step-by-step instructions for implementing a technology solution.
- Video and multimedia files** are used for a broad range of marketing communications, from customer testimonials to product demonstrations to executive interviews.
- Blog articles** are brief online dispatches that treat current topics in an informal style, with the intention of engaging customers and prospects.
- Infographics** offer visual representations of data and trends, with the goal of communicating complex information succinctly.
- Webinars** are online seminars that deliver presentations or workshops either live or in a prerecorded, on-demand format.
- E-books** are long-format documents designed to be consumed digitally, delivering information in a visually stimulating and often interactive way.
- Podcasts and audio files** are audio recordings of customer testimonials or discussions with subject matter experts that can be streamed from a Web site or downloaded onto a desktop or mobile device.
- Customer magazines and publications**, in print and online, deliver company news and explore key issues and trends.

## RESPONDENTS BY COMPANY SIZE

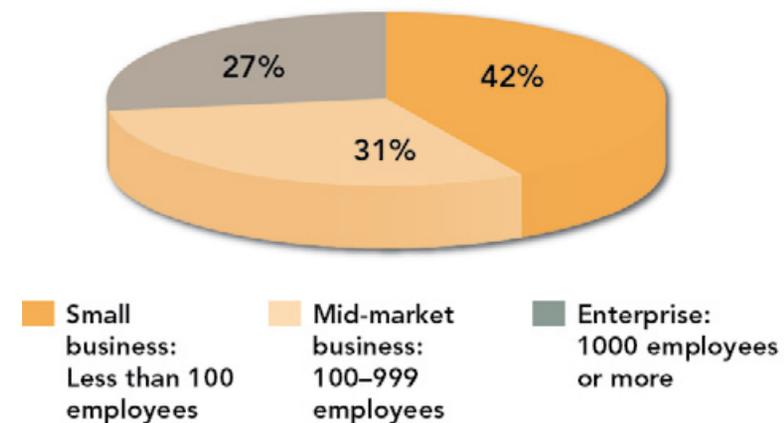


FIGURE 4: What is the size of your company?

- Competitive vendor worksheets** compare product features and functions from multiple vendors.
- E-newsletters and digests** deliver the traditional newsletter in an electronic format and typically feature quick article summaries with links to longer treatments.
- Social content** is any form of content delivered through social-media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.
- Web slide shows** are online presentations that cover product details or key trends, typically with an emphasis on charts and images.
- Tweets** are 140-character messages that update company or industry news and often contain links to more in-depth content with the goal of engaging customers over the long term.

Finally, as in previous survey reports, we have included data and information from other surveys conducted in our industry where those findings support or validate the findings from the Eccolo Media survey.

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→ **Each** year, we continue to expand the number and variety of assets we survey against and confirm that technology buyers use these assets throughout the buying cycle.

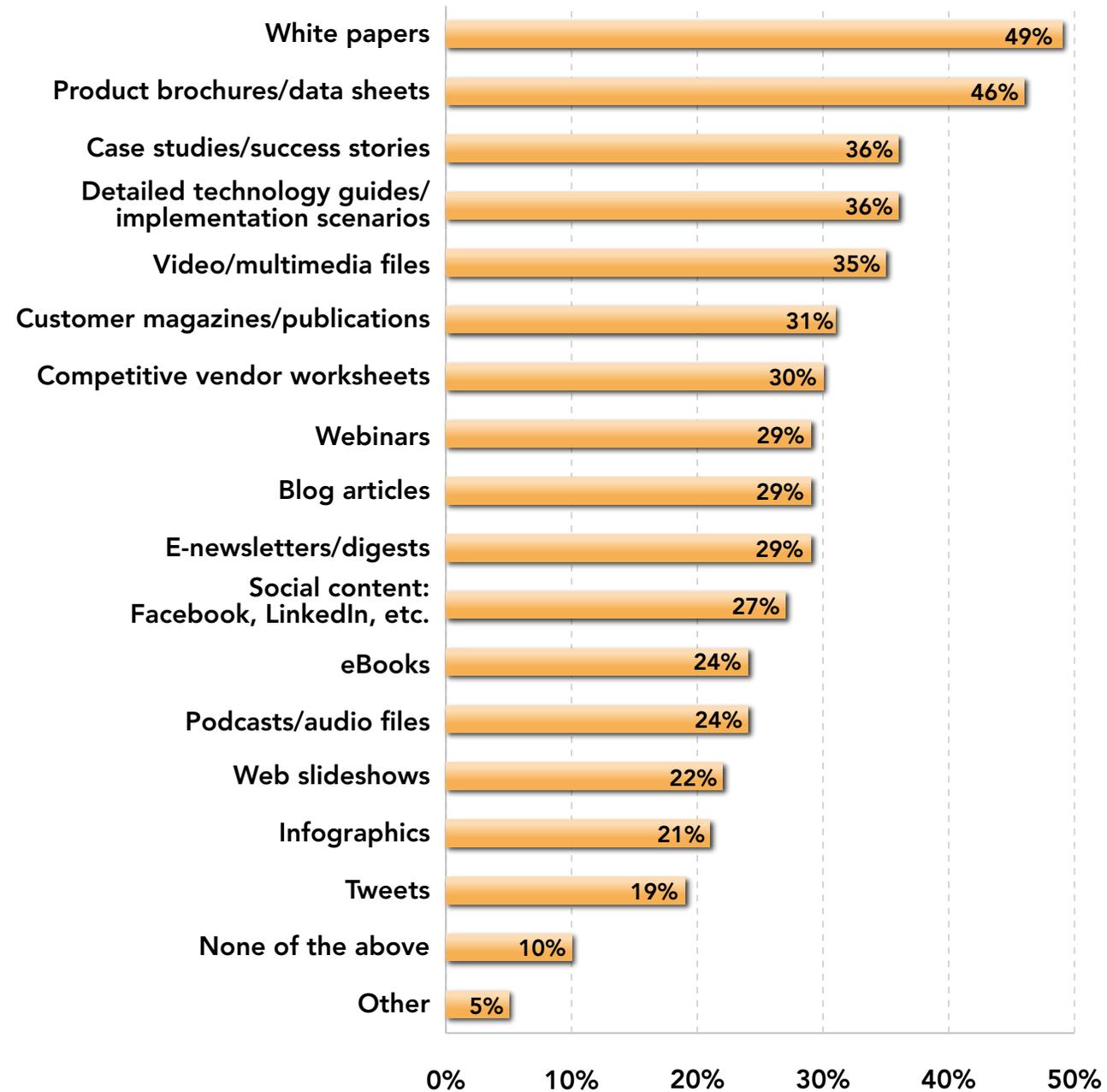
In fact, when asked how many assets they consume on average when considering a technology purchase, 50 percent of our survey respondents say they consume two to five assets before they're ready to make a purchase.

Twenty-six percent of mid-market and large enterprise respondents say they consume six to eight assets when in a buying cycle. That's confirmed by 2013 research by IDG Enterprise, which shows enterprise buyers download an average of eight informational assets during a technology purchase process.<sup>1</sup>

We asked respondents about the content types they consumed in the six months before taking the survey (Figure 5). As in previous surveys, white papers rank as the most frequently consumed content type (49 percent). Following closely are product brochures/data sheets (46 percent); case studies/success stories and detailed technology guides/implementation scenarios (36 percent); and video/multimedia files (35 percent).

The most consumed content types have remained fairly

CONTENT TYPES BY FREQUENCY OF CONSUMPTION



**FIGURE 5:** Which vendor collateral types have you consumed to evaluate a technology purchase in the last 6 months?

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<sup>1</sup> "Customer Engagement: The Role of Content in the IT Purchase Process," IDG Enterprise, September 2013.

consistent for the past three years (Figure 6). While video is still among the top five most frequently consumed content types in our 2014 survey, and despite its widely reported popularity among content consumers, it has fallen year over year, from 59 percent in 2011 and 40 percent in 2012 to 35 percent this year. Podcasts/ audio files drop out of the top five for 2014, falling from 42 percent in 2011 and 37 percent in 2012 to 24 percent this year.

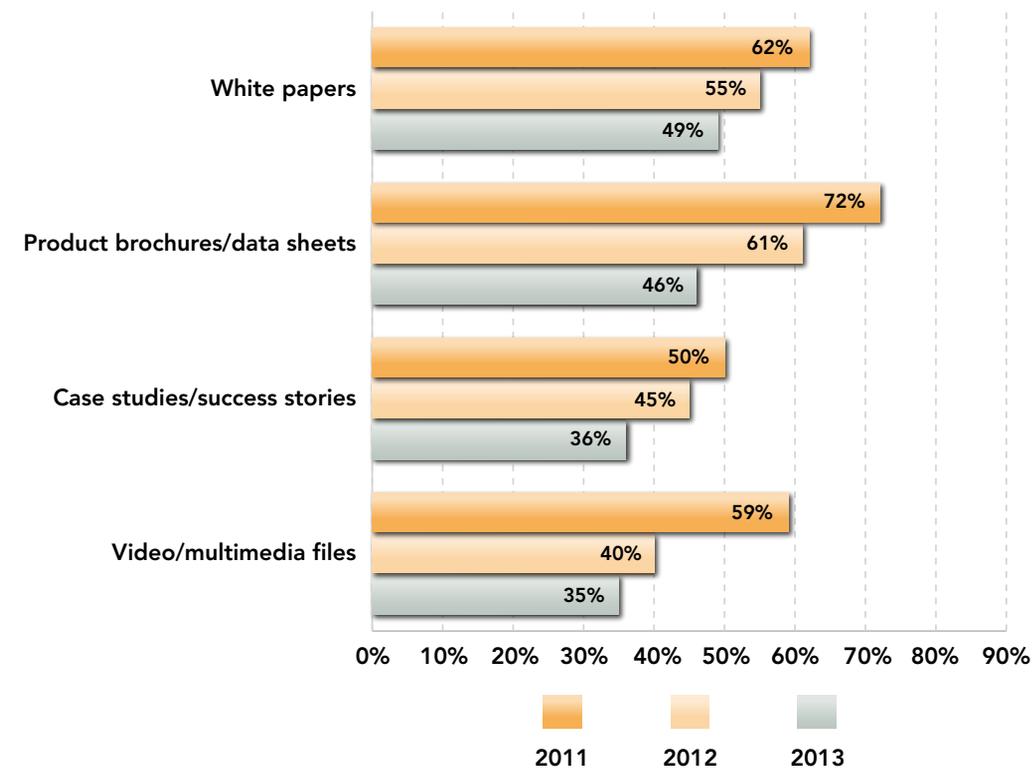
While that may point to a decrease in the use of these assets, it also reflects the fact that tech purchasers now have a wider array of content types from which to choose. This is reflected in our survey. From 2008 to 2010, we surveyed against only five collateral asset types: white papers; case studies/success stories; videos; podcasts/audio files; and product brochures/data sheets. This year, respondents were surveyed on 16 different assets. While technology buyers continue to rely heavily on traditional collateral types such as white papers and product brochures, they are also spreading their attention across other information sources such as blogs and social content.

For example, some of the content types we include for the first time this year are also consumed with some frequency. Thirty-one percent of respondents use customer magazines/publications when considering a tech purchase, while competitive vendor worksheets come in at 30 percent, and e-newsletters/digests at 29 percent of respondents.



Product brochures are the only content type that small business buyers consume in any quantity approaching that of mid-market and enterprise buyers.

**MOST CONSUMED CONTENT TYPES, 2011, 2012, 2013**



**FIGURE 6:** The most consumed content types have remained fairly consistent year over year.

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### How Can You Produce the Content Buyers Want?

What do technology buyers look for in content? We asked our 2014 respondents about their likes and dislikes in white papers, case studies, and video:

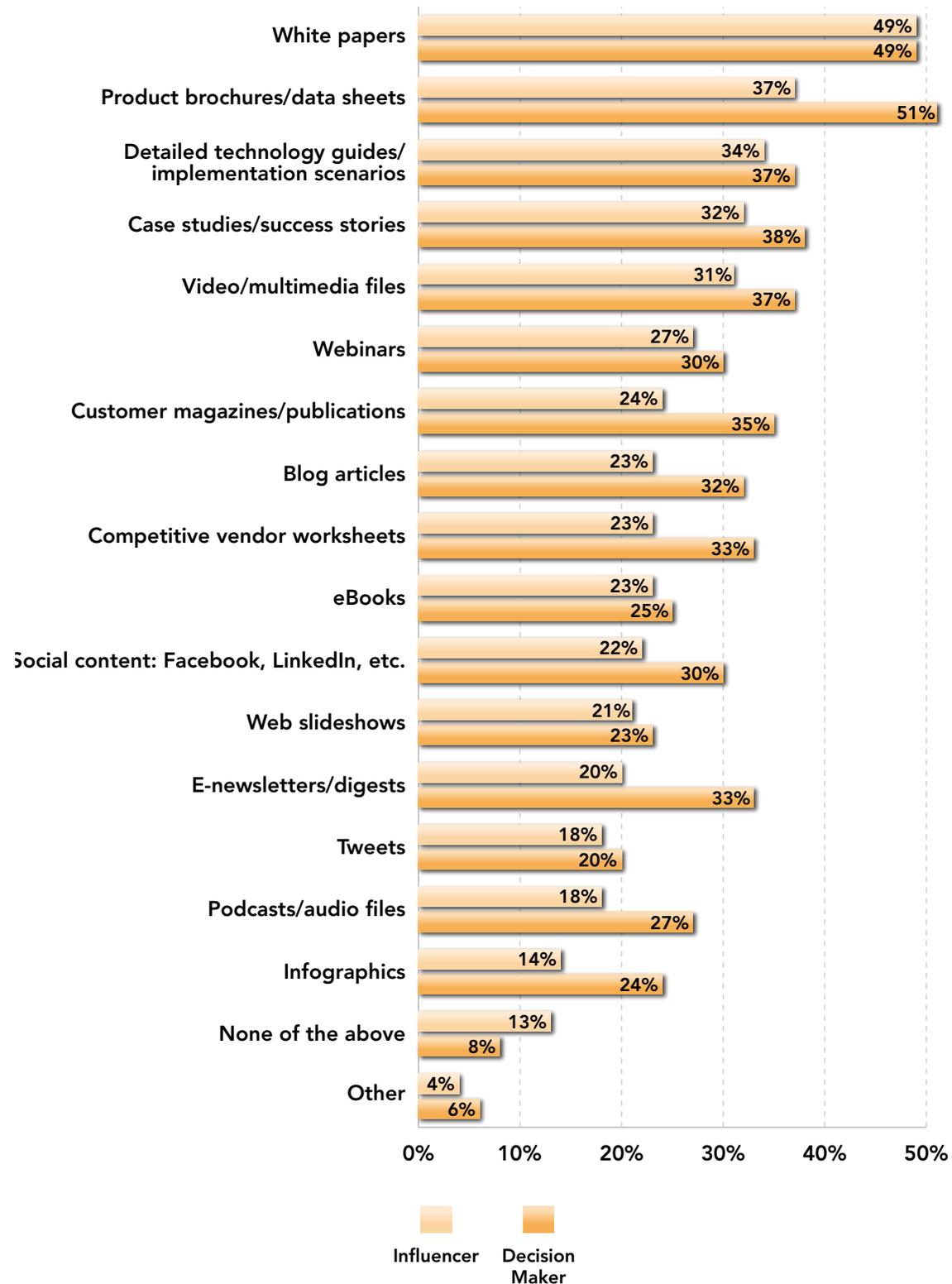
**WHITE PAPERS**—Respondents are most disappointed by too much focus on vendor or product information. That’s supported by recent findings from other studies. Technology buyers rate “too much marketing hype,” “lack of truly independent, unbiased information,” and “information is too general” as their top three content problems, according to IDG Enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

**CASE STUDIES**—In general, buyers overwhelmingly prefer traditional written case studies to those presented as audio, video, one-page summaries, or Microsoft PowerPoint slides. Small business buyers show a slight preference for one-page summaries when compared to mid-market and enterprise respondents, but even they prefer traditional written case studies over other formats.

**VIDEO**—Buyers most want video that features a relevant topic, followed by a high production value. Humor is also highly rated. That suggests buyers want to be entertained as well as informed.

<sup>2</sup> “Customer Engagement: The Role of Content in the IT Purchase Process,” IDG Enterprise, September 2013.

#### CONTENT CONSUMPTION BY ROLE



**FIGURE 7:** Which vendor collateral types have you consumed to evaluate a technology purchase in the last 6 months? Influencer vs. decision maker.

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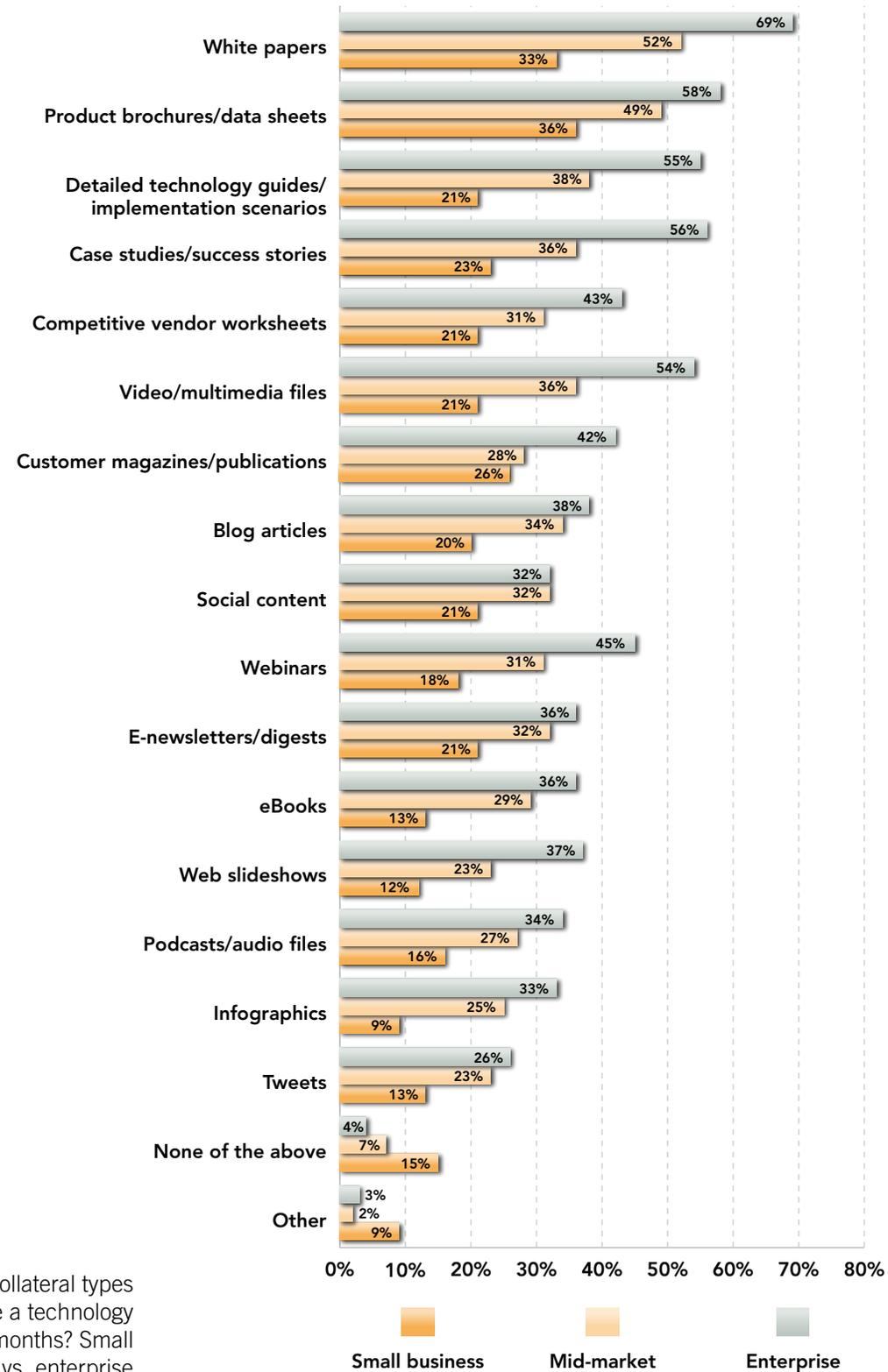
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### CONTENT TYPES RANKED BY INFLUENCE IN PURCHASE PROCESS



**FIGURE 8:** Which vendor collateral types did you use to evaluate a technology purchase in the last 6 months? Small business vs. mid-market vs. enterprise

In past surveys, we didn't uncover a large difference in frequency of asset consumption between influencers and decision makers. This year, however, decision makers show slightly higher consumption rates in many content categories (Figure 7).

Consistent with findings in previous years, small businesses consume far less content than mid-market and large companies (Figure 8). Product brochures are the only content type that small businesses consume in any quantity approaching that of mid-market and large companies.

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It's clear many technology buyers turn to vendor content when making purchasing decisions. In fact, when buyers select vendors, 50 percent of the time they have downloaded content from the vendor, according to IDG Enterprise.<sup>3</sup> No wonder companies invest heavily in content marketing. Across all industries, marketers spend \$44 billion a year on custom content.<sup>4</sup>

But just how influential is this content? Each year, we probe respondents on content influence to gain insight into which content types are most useful to buyers during a technology purchase.

We asked respondents to rate the top five most influential collateral types—with 1 being most influential and 5 least influential—from among 16 content categories (Figure 9). White papers are most frequently ranked as most influential, with 124 of 503 respondents giving them a top rating. Case studies come in somewhat lower, with 65 respondents rating them highest, followed by product brochures (52), technology guides (39), and video (29).

But those are merely the numbers of respondents who gave the asset types a top rating. We also wanted to look at the overall influence of each content category. To achieve that, we weighted each score, assigning 5 points to a rating of

CONTENT TYPES RANKED BY INFLUENCE IN PURCHASE PROCESS

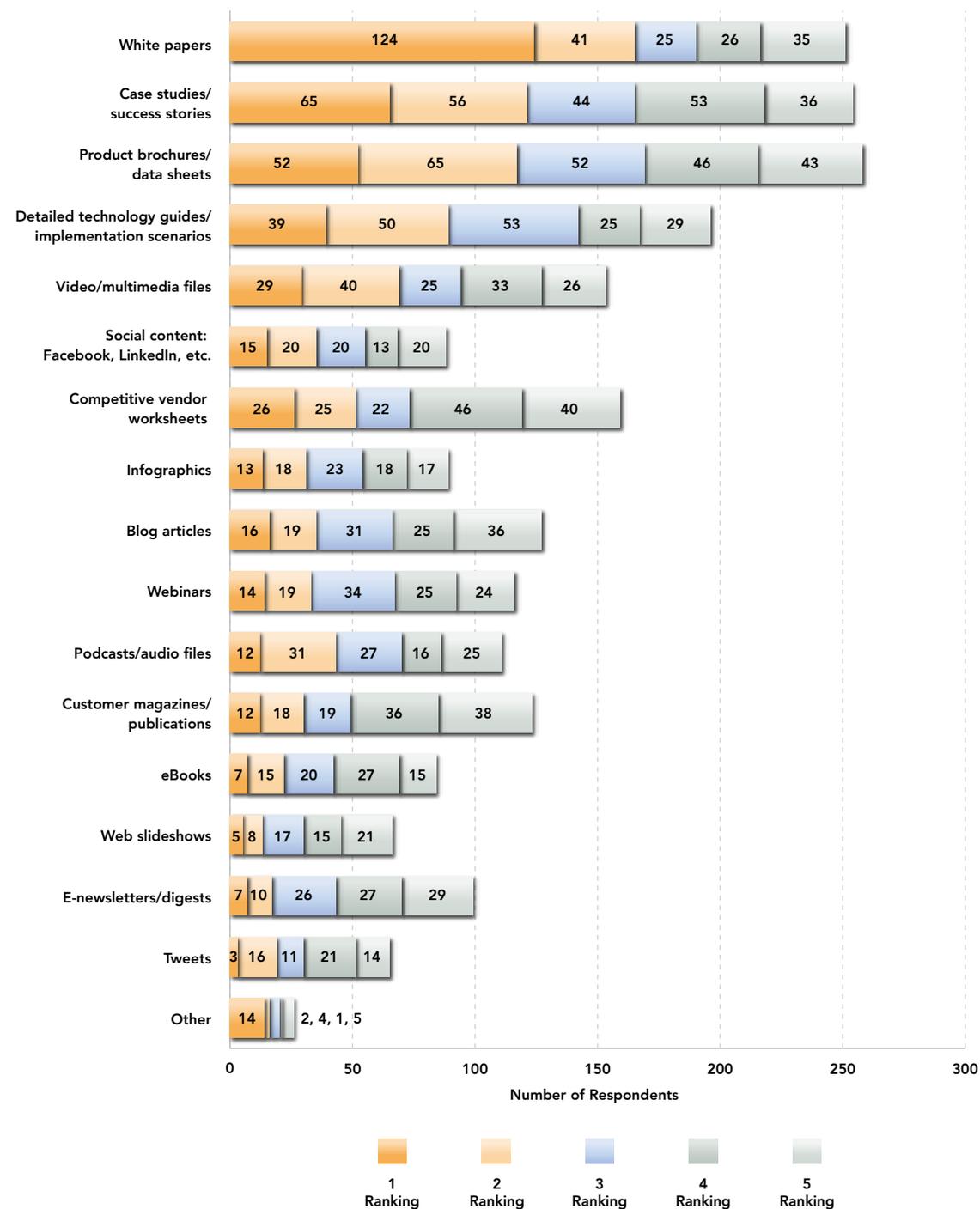


FIGURE 9: Which vendor collateral types do you find most influential when you evaluate a technology purchase, with 1 being most influential and 5 being least influential?

<sup>3</sup>“Customer Engagement: The Role of Content in the IT Purchase Process,” IDG Enterprise, September 2013.

<sup>4</sup>“Characteristics Study: A Look at the Volume and Type of Content Marketing in America for 2013,” Customer Content Council, April 2013.

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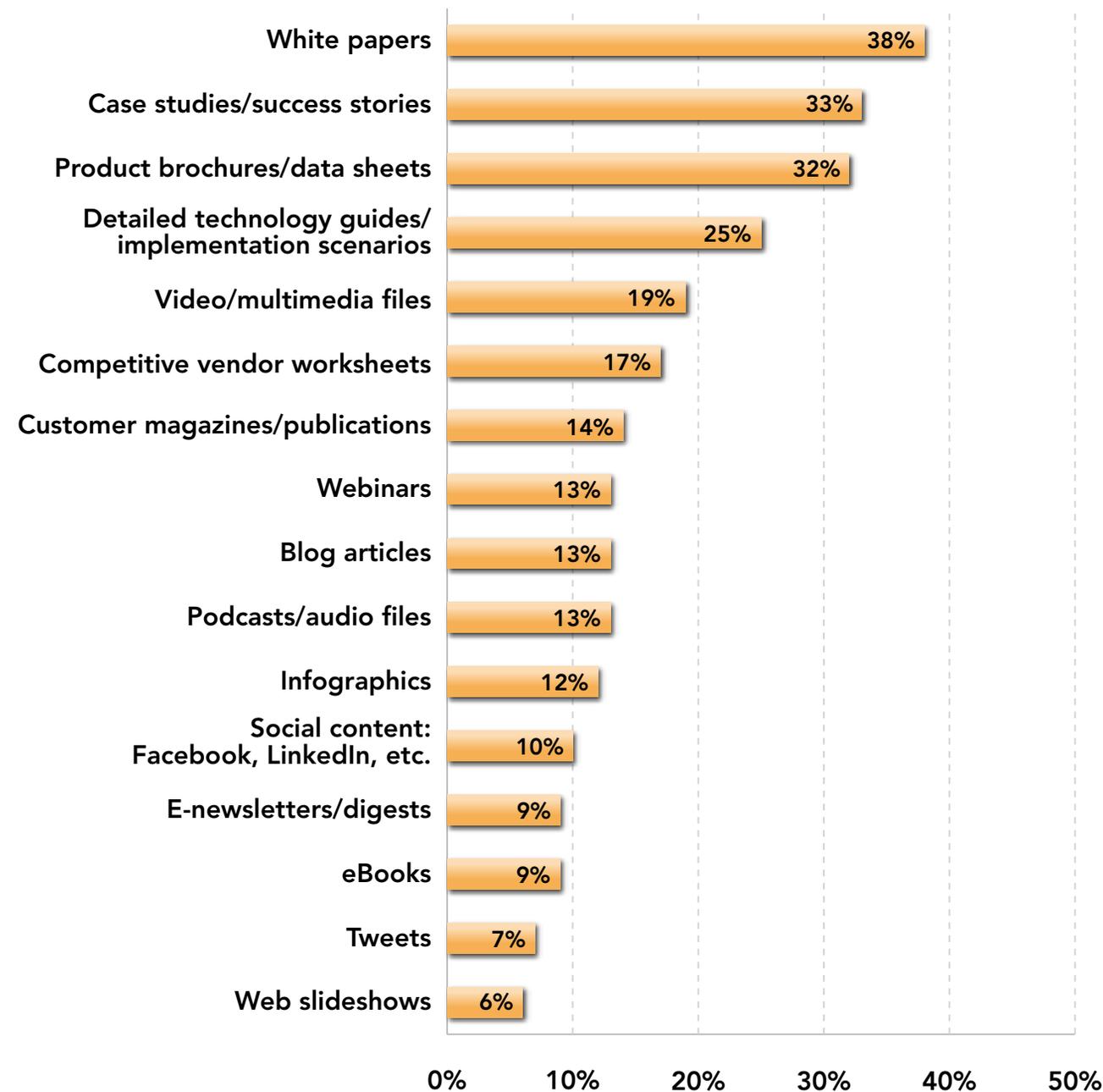
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→ 1; 4 points to a rating of 2; and so on. We then aggregated those scores to determine a weighted average for each category. That yields a clear view of the overall influence of each content type (Figure 10).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the most consumed content types are also the most influential. The ever-popular white paper comes out on top when compared to all asset categories (see sidebar, “White Papers Still Reign Supreme”). While product brochures are consumed more than case studies, case studies are seen as slightly more influential than product brochures/data sheets by our respondents.

But what happens when content types aren’t compared to one another and are considered on their own? We asked respondents to describe the individual influence of white papers, technology guides, case studies, video, blog articles, infographics, and social content when making a technology purchase.

### AGGREGATED CONTENT INFLUENCE



**FIGURE 10:** Weighting assets by how frequently they were ranked 1 through 5 provides an aggregated view of what assets respondents find most influential in a purchase process.

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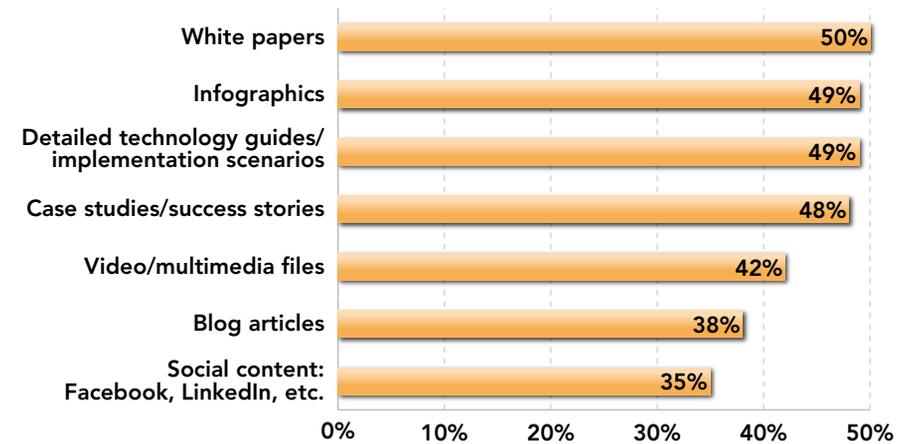
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→ When looked at from this perspective, many respondents feel all asset types have substantial value. Half of all respondents describe white papers as “very” or “extremely” influential in their purchase decision making. Technology guides and infographics score almost as high, at 49 percent, as do case studies (48 percent), followed by video (42 percent). Blogs and social content are rated somewhat lower, at 38 percent and 35 percent (Figure 11).

We did see differences in content influence by role and company size. Decision makers find white papers slightly more influential than do influencers. But influencers are more likely to describe video, infographics, and social content as very to extremely influential during a purchase decision.

### ASSETS RANKED VERY OR EXTREMELY INFLUENTIAL



**FIGURE 11:** Asset types described by respondents as “very” or “extremely” influential in a technology purchase process.

And just as respondents from mid-market companies and large enterprises indicate that they consume all asset types with more frequency than those from small businesses, they are also more likely to describe the content they consume as very to extremely influential.

## Influence of Content Is Dropping. Why?

**H**ow has the influence of content on technology buying changed over time? In our 2010 survey, 41 percent of respondents said white papers were very to extremely influential. In 2011, that number leapt to 65 percent. It then dropped to 57 percent in 2012 and fell again to 50 percent this year. We saw similar results in other content categories.

What’s driving this trend? While content marketing has been with us since 1895, when Deere & Co. launched *The Furrow* magazine to help farmers become more profitable, only in the past few years has it been embraced as a core marketing strategy.

In our 2011 survey, when content influence was rated the highest, content marketing was still new to many technology buyers. They may have been dazzled by the volume and variety of asset types and inclined to rate everything they consumed with a relatively high influence.

Since that time, tech buyers have likely become more discriminating—and less apt to find content influential just because it’s available. This makes the job of the content marketer even tougher. Any content produced must be of the highest quality, capturing the attention of the finicky buyer with the right message at just the right time.

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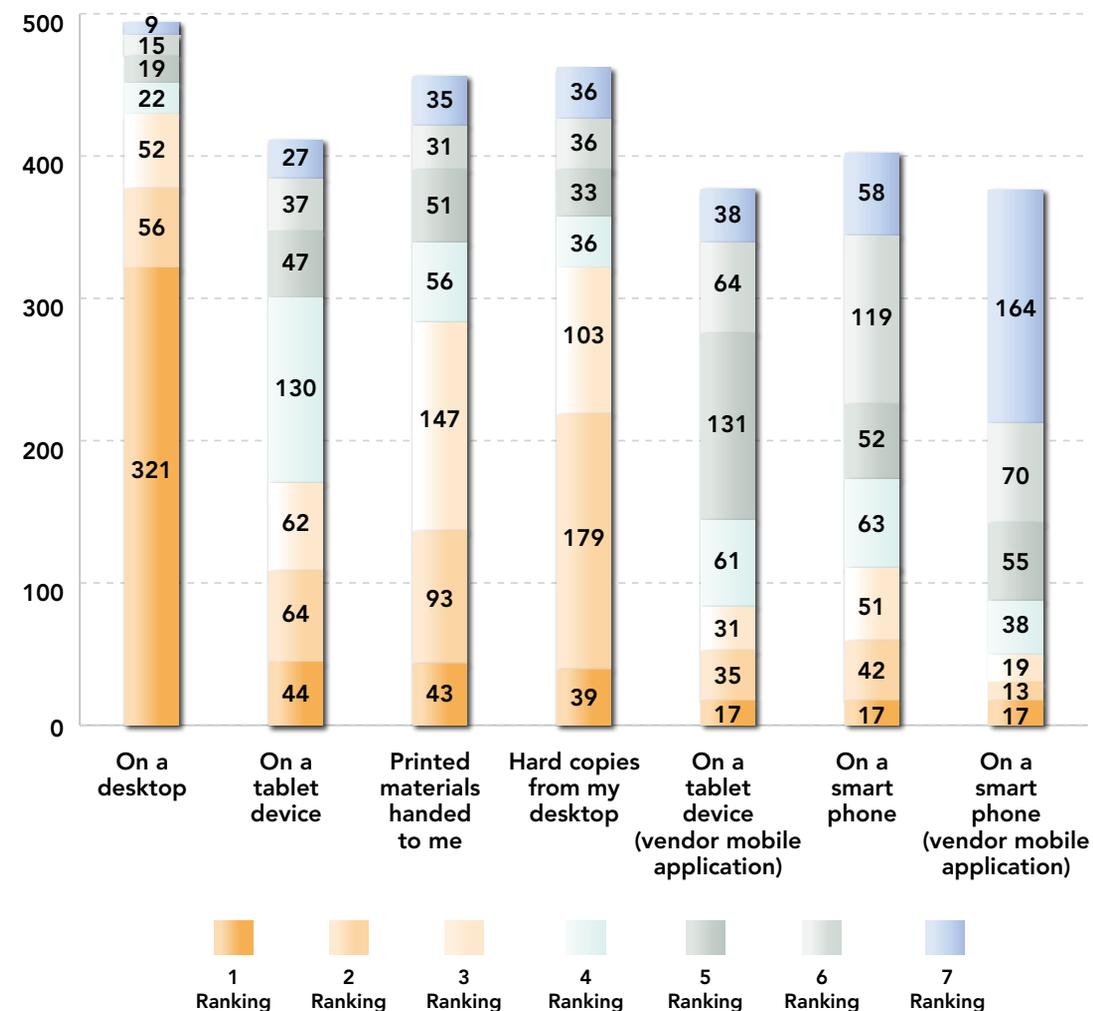
In past surveys, respondents said that when considering a technology purchase, they were most likely to consume content on a desktop computer. This finding is repeated for 2014. Asked to rank how they most frequently consume content, 321 of 503 respondents rank consuming content via desktops as No. 1. That's followed by tablet devices, with 44 top rankings, and reading printed materials, with 43 top rankings (Figure 12).

Respondents are likewise traditional in their choice of content distribution channels (Figure 13). Browsing a vendor Web site and having content forwarded from a personal contact are rated the top most frequent means of receiving vendor content (with 158 and 155 top rankings, respectively). "Forwarded from a sales rep or vendor contact" is highest rated by 63 respondents, and "from direct-response campaigns" is highest rated by 60 respondents.

Channels rated as the second most frequent means of receiving content include "browsing a vendor Web site," with 114 rankings; "direct-response campaigns," with 105; and "forwarded from personal contact," with 84. These findings echo other recent research, as IDG Enterprise reports that technology sites, peers, search engines, technology publications, and video are the top five content sources.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "Customer Engagement: The Role of Content in the IT Purchase Process," IDG Enterprise, September 2013.

### HOW CONTENT IS CONSUMED



**FIGURE 12:** How do you most frequently consume vendor content, with 1 being the most frequent and 7 being the least frequent?

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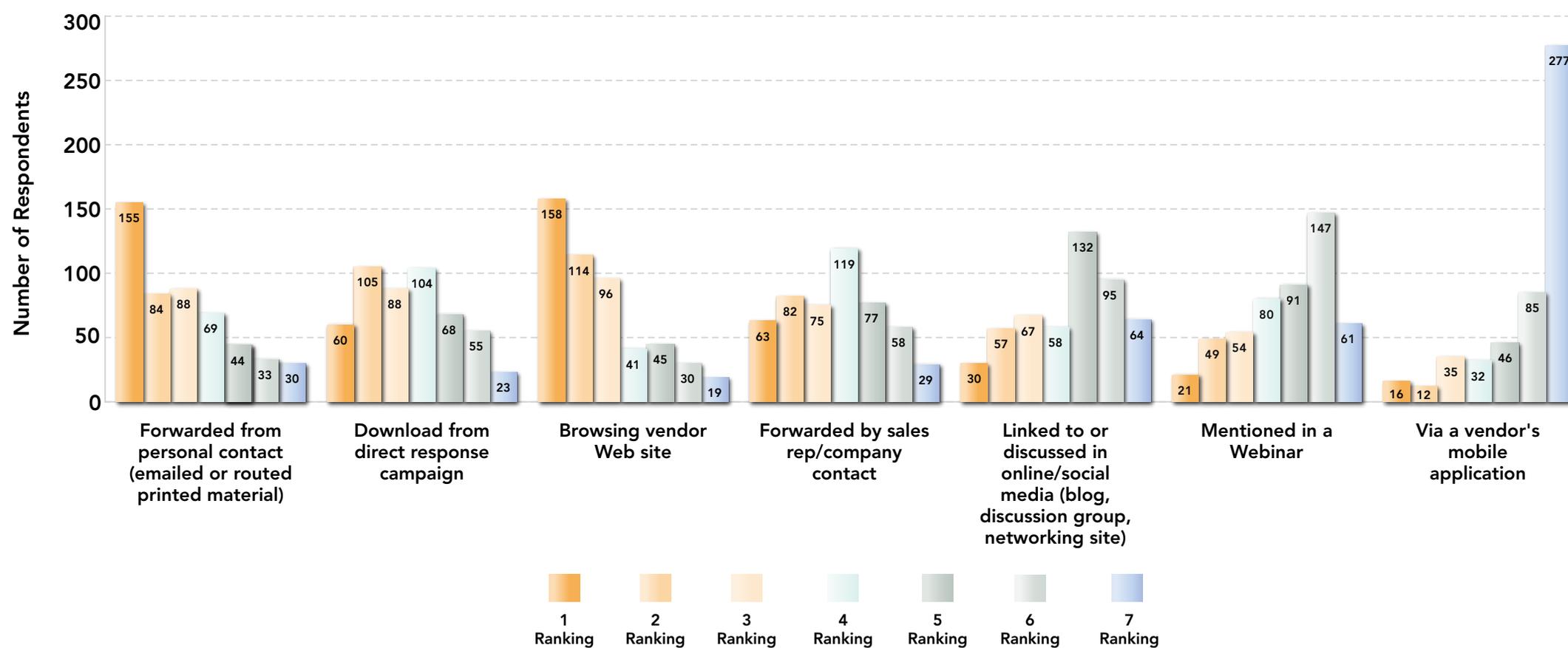
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→ We also asked respondents to rank distribution channels by influence (Figure 14). While Web sites and personal contact tie for most frequent source of content, personal contact is more influential than browsing a vendor Web site (174 vs. 131 top rankings). This finding is consistent with a recent Forrester Research report, which shows that the most trusted content is from personal recommendations, followed by online reviews, natural search engine results, and branded Web sites.<sup>6</sup>

### FREQUENCY OF USE OF CONTENT DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS



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FIGURE 13: How frequently do you use various distribution channels to receive vendor content, with 1 being the most frequent and 7 being the least frequent?

<sup>6</sup> "How to Build Your Brand with Branded Content," Forrester Research, March 2013.

→ Still, it's worth noting that vendor Web sites remain a highly used and influential channel. Social media, on the other hand, is less frequently used (30 top rankings) as well as less influential (32 top rankings). In the years ahead, we'll take a closer look at these numbers as the social media landscape continues to mature.



IDG Enterprise reports that technology sites, peers, search engines, technology publications, and video are the top five content sources.

### INFLUENCE OF CONTENT DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

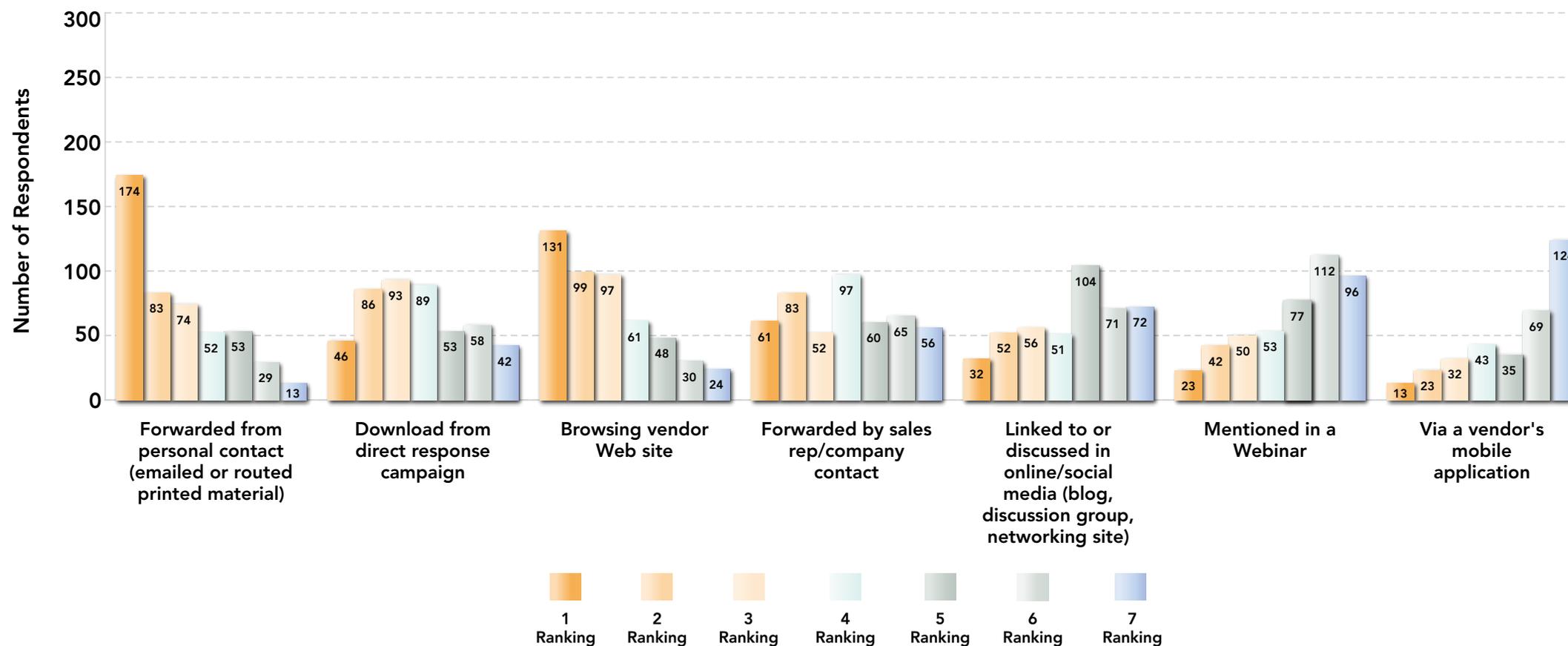


FIGURE 14: What content distribution channels are most influential when receiving vendor content, with 1 being the most influential and 7 being the least influential?

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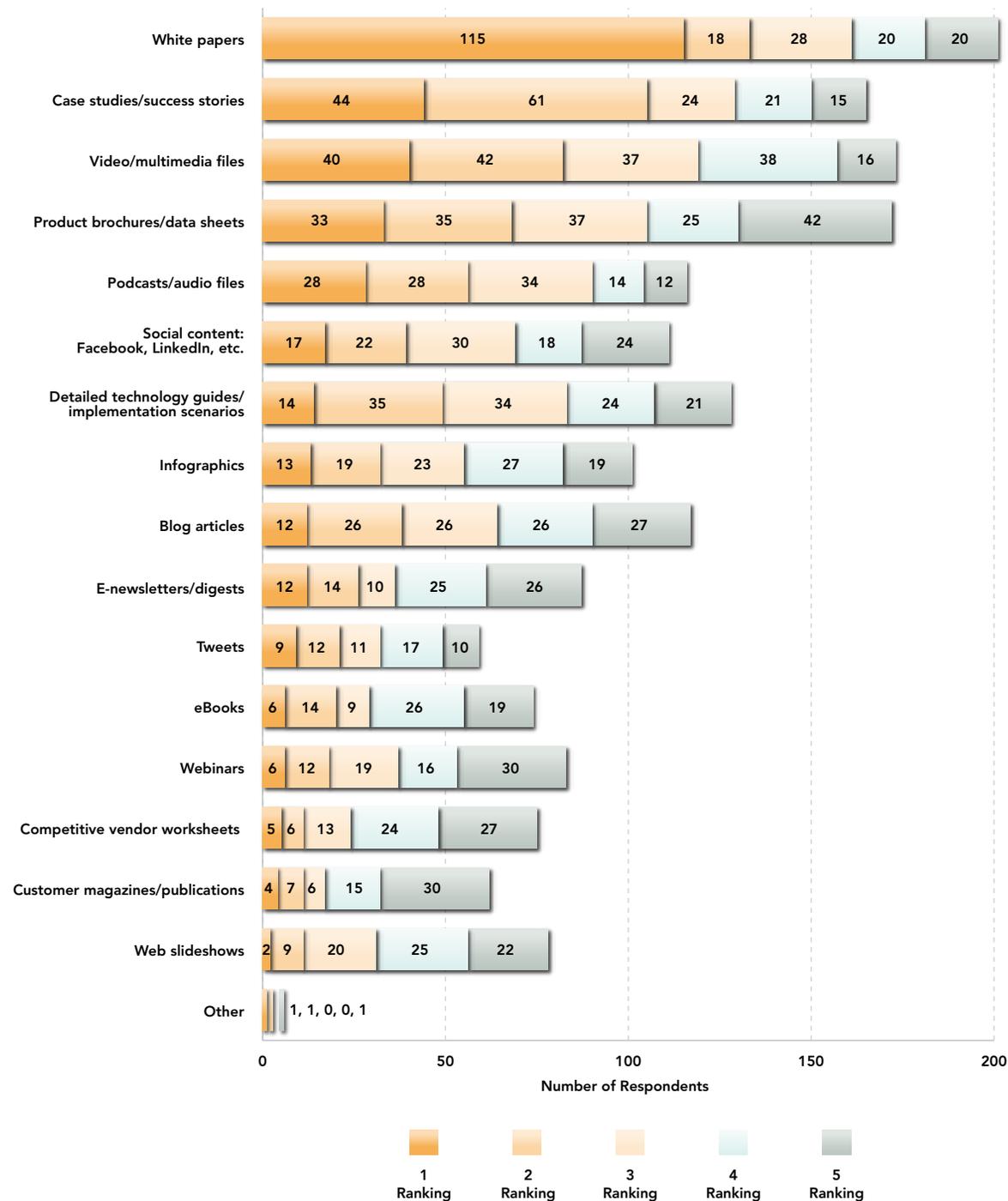
→ **It's** no secret: More and more business activities are carried out on tablets and smartphones. In fact, 10 percent of this year's respondents took this survey on a mobile device.

Overall, 71 percent of respondents say they consume vendor content on a mobile device. In addition, all 16 content types covered in the survey are consumed through a mobile channel by at least some of our respondents. Content marketers seem to be taking note: 38 percent of B2B marketers told the Content Marketing Institute they produce content specifically for mobile platforms.<sup>7</sup>

We asked respondents two subtly different questions about their mobile use: Which content types do they “most frequently consume” on a mobile device, and which content types are they “more likely to consume” on a mobile device? The first measures actual behavior. The second gauges expectations or desires.

With 115 top rankings, white papers are the most frequently consumed vendor content on a mobile device (Figure 15). Respondents

### TYPES OF CONTENT CONSUMED VIA A MOBILE DEVICE



**FIGURE 15:** What type of vendor content are you most likely to consume during a purchase process on a mobile device, with 1 being most frequent and 5 being least frequent?

<sup>7</sup> “B2B Content Marketing 2014: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends, North America,” Content Marketing Institute, October 2013.

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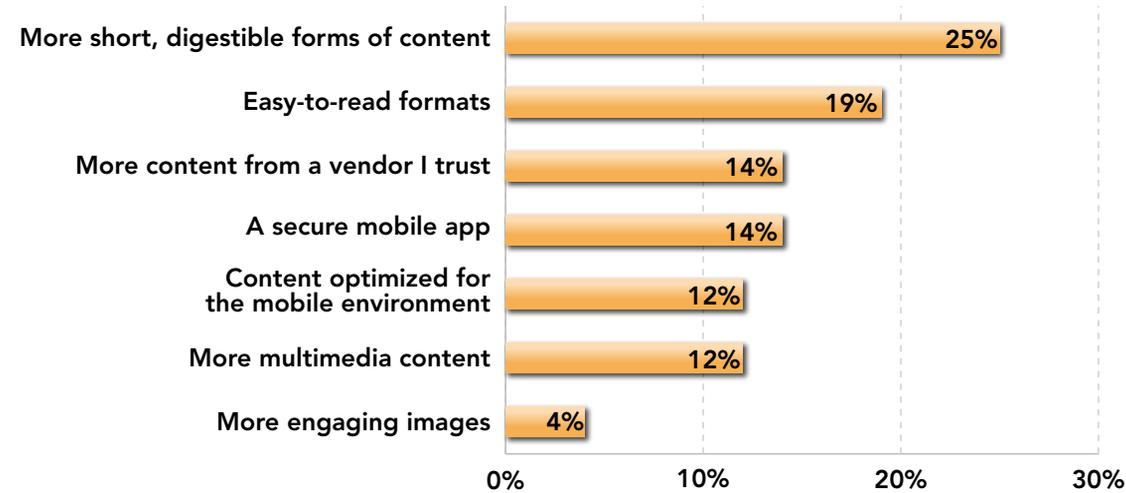
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from small businesses are less likely to access white papers on mobile devices than those from mid-market and large enterprises, but then small businesses are less likely to consume white papers in general. Other categories consumed on a mobile device with less frequency than white papers include case studies, video, product brochures, and podcasts.

Asked what would lead them to consume more vendor content on a mobile device, one-quarter of respondents cite shorter, more digestible forms of content, while 19 percent want easy-to-read formats (Figure 16).

**FACTORS IN MOBILE CONTENT CONSUMPTION**



**FIGURE 16:** What would cause you to consume more vendor content via your mobile device?

## White Papers Still Reign Supreme

Year after year, our survey respondents say white papers are the most consumed and most influential asset when making a technology purchase.

Nearly half of all technology buyers consume white papers, and 50 percent say they're very or extremely influential. White papers are also among the most helpful assets in every phase of the sales cycle, from pre-sales through final sales. After purchase, they're the asset most likely to be consumed by a purchaser. They're even the

content type most accessed on a mobile device. Respondents like white papers that are well-written and that cover industry developments. They reject white papers that focus too much on vendor and product information. These results suggest marketers have a tremendous opportunity to leverage white papers to engage and influence technology buyers—if they focus on industry developments and limit discussion of vendor product information.

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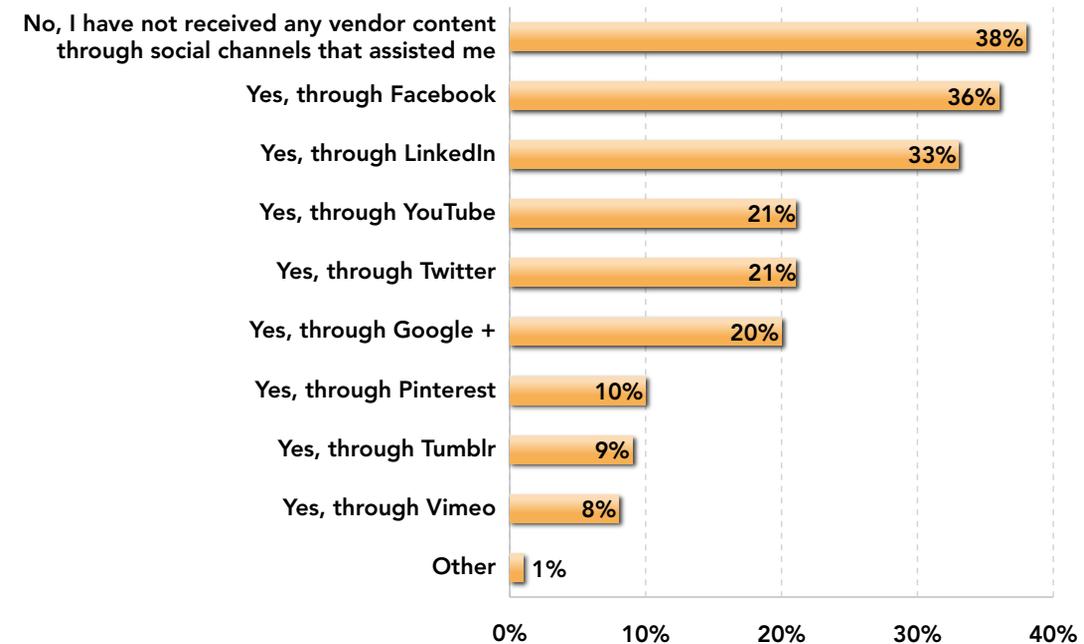
→ **Starting** in 2012, we began to explore how technology buyers consume social content and use these channels during a technology purchase. After all, 81 percent of marketers now create content specifically for social media, and more than 40 percent expect to increase their output of social content, according to the Custom Content Council.<sup>8</sup>

As with mobile channels, we asked two slightly different questions about social media: from which social channels have respondents “received” vendor content, and from which social channels are they “most likely to consume” vendor content?

Sixty-two percent of respondents receive vendor content through social channels (Figure 17). Among them, the primary channels they use are Facebook (36 percent) and LinkedIn (33 percent). Respondents also receive content through YouTube, Twitter, and Google+. In general, small business respondents use less social content than those from mid-market and large enterprises.

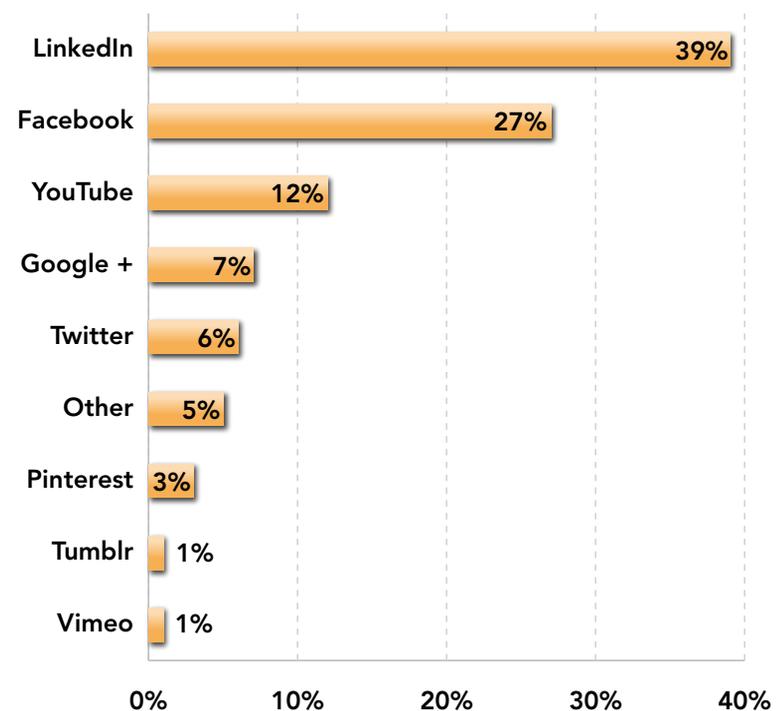
While Facebook is the social channel through which our respondents actually receive the most content, LinkedIn surges ahead when respondents are asked through which social channel they’re “most likely to consume” vendor content (Figure 18).

### USE OF SOCIAL CHANNELS TO CONSUME VENDOR CONTENT



**FIGURE 17:** Have you received vendor content through social channels that assisted you in a technology purchase in the last six months?

### PREFERRED SOCIAL CHANNELS FOR FINDING VENDOR CONTENT



**FIGURE 18:** Which social channels are you most likely to receive and consume vendor content from?

<sup>8</sup>“Characteristics Study: A Look at the Volume and Type of Content Marketing in America for 2013,” Customer Content Council, April 2013.

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→ Thirty-nine percent tap LinkedIn as their most likely social channel, while Facebook garners only 27 percent of respondents (see sidebar, “Social Wars: Facebook vs. LinkedIn”). YouTube, Google+, Twitter, and Pinterest all trail. Note that while 21 percent of buyers receive vendor collateral through Twitter, only 6 percent expect Twitter to be a source of such content.

Asked which content types they are likely to consume through social channels, respondents most often say white papers (16 percent) and case studies (14 percent), followed by video (11 percent) and podcasts (9 percent). Other categories show lower usage, but every content type is consumed through social channels by at least some respondents.

### Social Wars: Facebook vs. LinkedIn

**F**acebook and LinkedIn are the giants of social media. But which takes the lead as a source of content to support technology buying decisions?

When respondents are asked which social channels they “have received” vendor content from, they choose Facebook over LinkedIn. That result, in part, is driven by mid-market companies, which are much more likely to use Facebook.

But when asked from which social channels they are “most likely to consume” vendor content, LinkedIn takes the lead, thanks to large enterprises, which far prefer LinkedIn to Facebook.

In short, while technology buyers actually receive more vendor content through Facebook, they perceive LinkedIn as the

channel through which they’re more likely to receive that content, especially enterprise respondents.

The perceived preference for LinkedIn is supported by other recent research. Three-quarters of B2B technology buyers rely on LinkedIn, while less than half turn to Facebook, according to IDG Enterprise.<sup>9</sup> Marketers seem to be responding in kind, as 91 percent used LinkedIn, followed by 81 percent for Facebook, according to the Content Marketing Institute.<sup>10</sup>

So who’s winning? Facebook is getting the most usage in this context. But LinkedIn is leading in the branding war, which, in the longer term, could work to its advantage. If respondents perceive it as the best channel for consuming vendor content, its usage is likely to increase.

<sup>9</sup> “Customer Engagement: The Role of Content in the IT Purchase Process,” IDG Enterprise, September 2013.

<sup>10</sup> “B2B Content Marketing 2014: Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends, North America,” Content Marketing Institute, October 2013.

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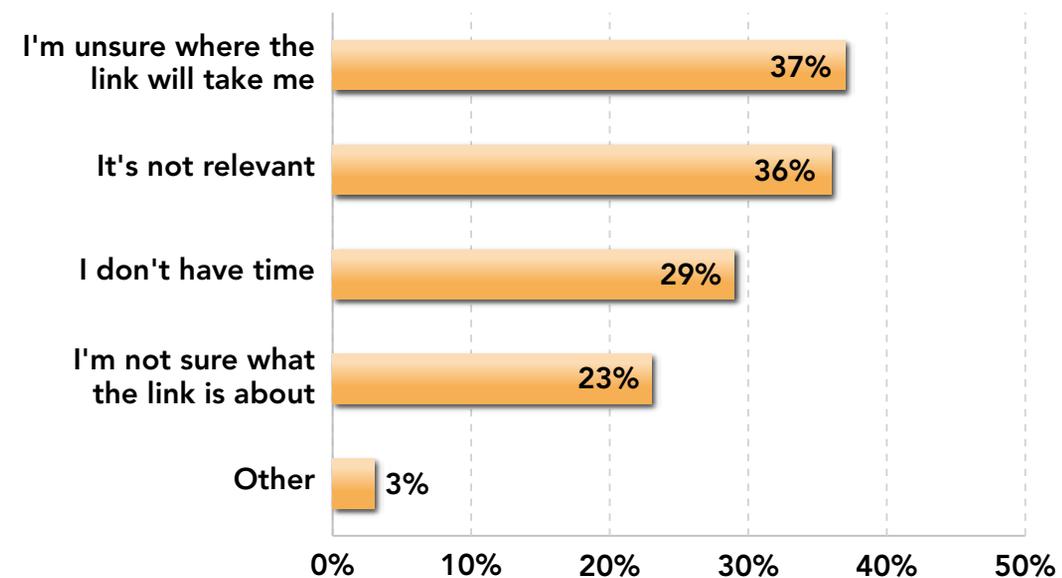
→ **Content** marketers strive to produce collateral that engages their target audience. One way to achieve this is to increase the opportunity for interactivity within the content.

We asked respondents how a high level of interactivity affects content influence. Overall, content consumers appreciate interactivity. Seventy-three percent say a high level of interactivity somewhat or greatly increases the influence of content, while only 6 percent say it decreases content influence.

We also asked respondents how often they click links embedded in content to access more information. Sixty-eight percent often or very often click for more information. Respondents from mid-market and large enterprises (63 percent) are more likely than those from small businesses (43 percent) to do so. When they don't click a link in vendor content, respondents (Figure 19) most often say it is because they aren't sure where the link will take them (37 percent) or whether the link is relevant (36 percent).

These results clearly indicate that, for our respondents, more interactivity means more influence, giving marketers a clear means of enhancing the influence of their content. It also suggests that marketers can do a better job of indicating the purpose of links in content and the value buyers can gain from clicking them.

### DRIVING INTERACTION WITH CONTENT



**FIGURE 19:** When you consume a vendor collateral type, why don't you click on an additional link to get more information?

## > Clicking on Tweets

In this year's survey, we asked about click-throughs in vendor tweets. When reading vendor tweets, 18 percent of respondents always click to access additional content. Forty percent sometimes click, while 26 percent never do. Influencers are more likely to interact with tweets in this way than are decision makers.

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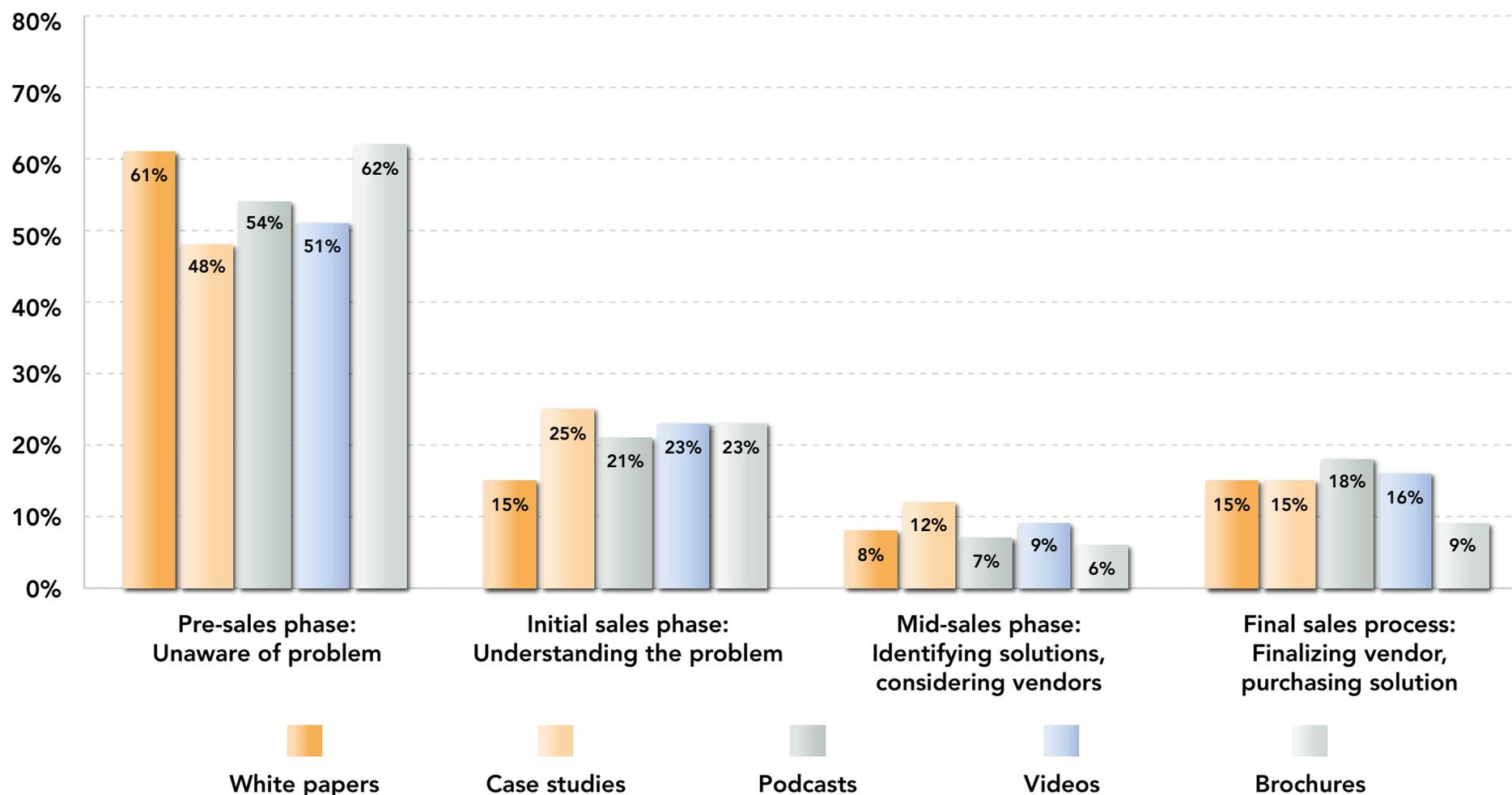
### BEST PRACTICES FOR 2014

As in previous surveys, we asked respondents to tell us how their use of marketing content relates to the sales cycle—specifically, at what point in the sales cycle do they find white papers, case studies, video/multimedia files, technology guides, infographics, and blog articles most helpful in the purchase process?

For the purposes of the survey, Eccolo defines the stages of the technology evaluation and purchase process as the following:

- PRE-SALES**—Unaware of the problem
- INITIAL SALES**—Understanding the problem
- MID-SALES**—Identifying solutions, considering vendors
- FINAL SALES**—Finalizing vendor, purchasing solution

**CONTENT CONSUMPTION IN THE SALES CYCLE: 2008**



**FIGURE 20:** At what point in the sales cycle did you first review each type of collateral? 2008 respondents.

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→ When we conducted our first survey in 2008, we found that technology buyers consumed vendor content in the early stages of the sales cycle by a wide margin (Figure 20.)

In the intervening years, we saw the consumption of all asset types

begin to extend into the mid and final stages of the buying cycle.

This year, we confirm that buyers' reliance on content has penetrated deeply across all four phases of the sales cycle (Figure 21). Of the six content types we surveyed, blogs are most helpful in the pre-sales phase (32 percent), and infographics come in second at 28 percent.

### CONTENT CONSUMPTION IN THE SALES CYCLE: 2014

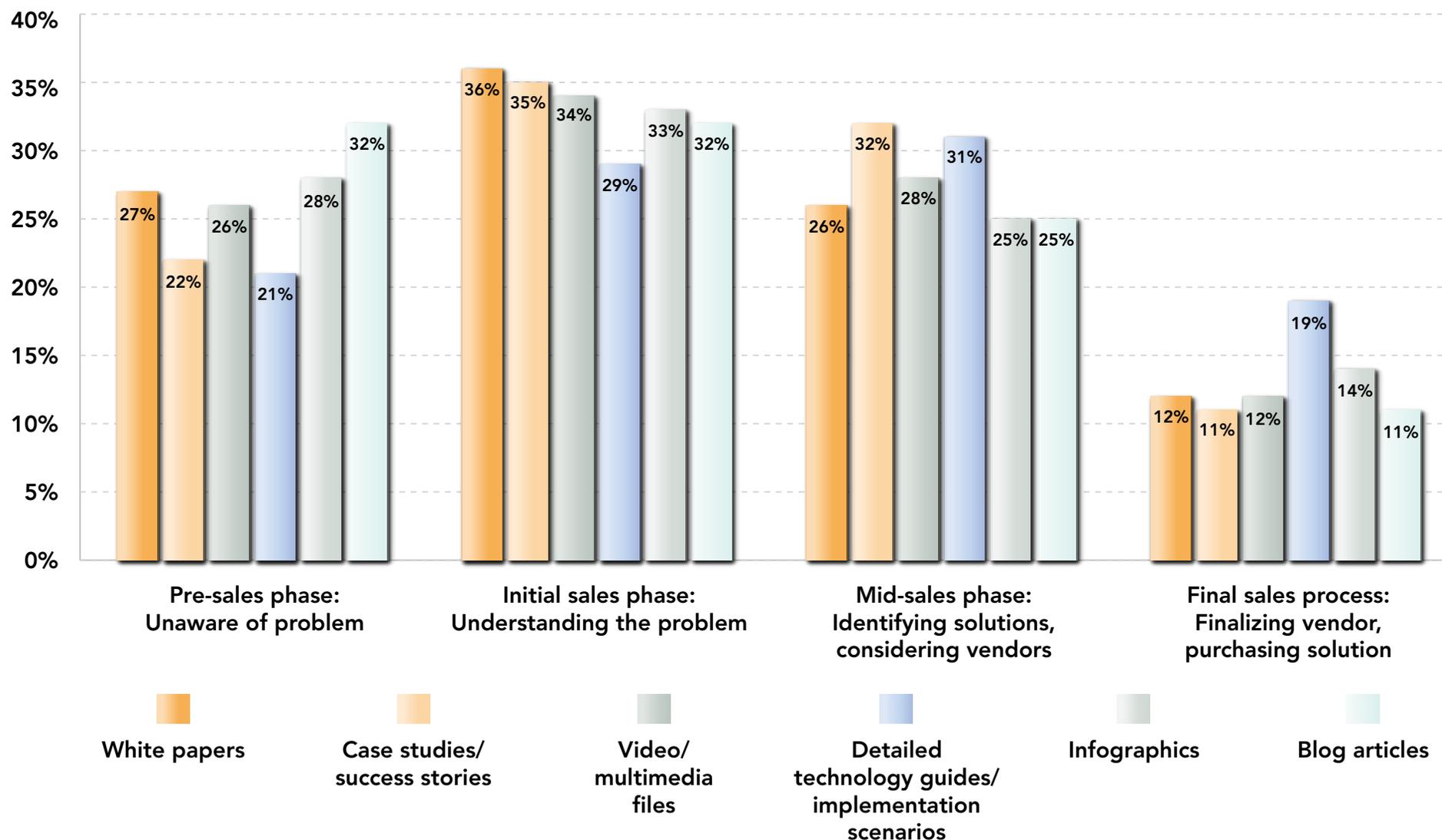


FIGURE 21: In which phase of the purchasing cycle do you find these content assets most helpful?

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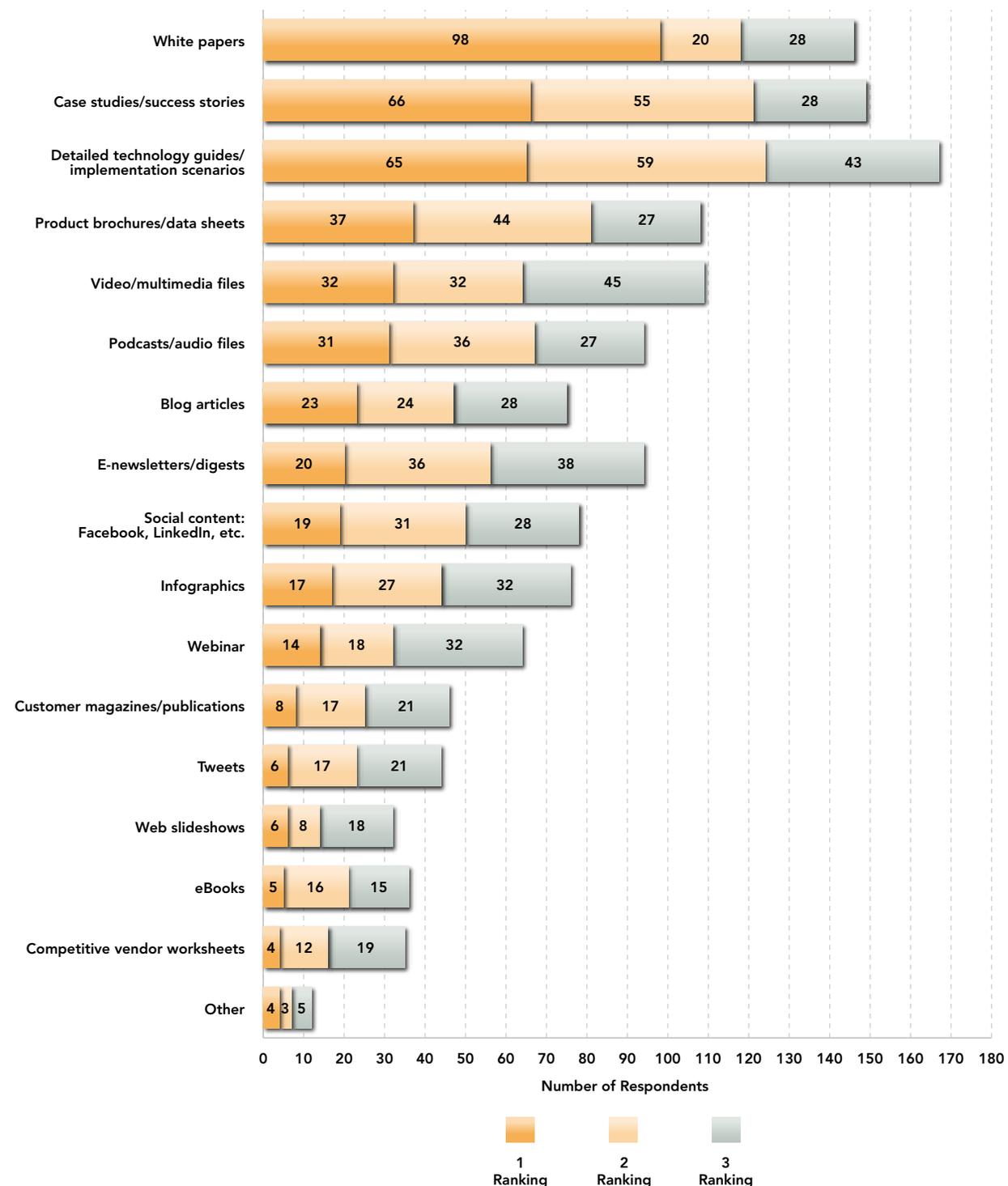
#### BEST PRACTICES FOR 2014

→ White papers score highest in the initial phase, case studies capture mid-sales, and technology guides are most helpful in the final phase.

This year, we also asked respondents about their attitudes after the sale is completed. Seventy-two percent say it's important or very important to receive ongoing content from the vendor. Small businesses, however, don't find such follow-up as important.

When asked to rate the top three content types they would consume after a purchase, respondents ranked white papers highest (98 respondents). Case studies had the second highest ranking (66 respondents) and technology guides third (37 respondents). This is essentially the same types of content that buyers most rely on before and during the sale.

### CONTENT CONSUMPTION AFTER PURCHASE



**FIGURE 22:** After you have completed a purchase from a vendor, what type of vendor content are you likely to consume, with 1 being most frequent and 3 being least frequent?

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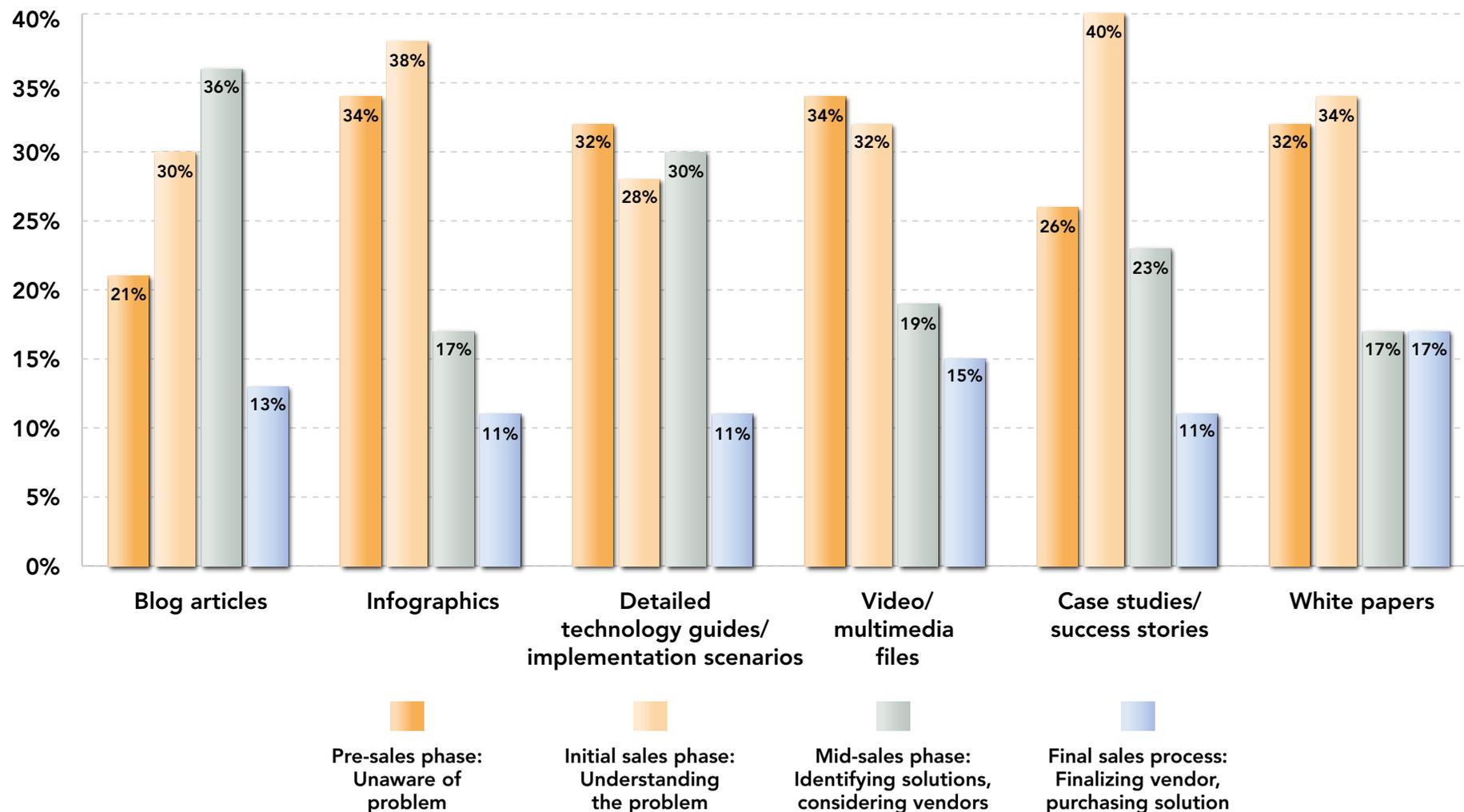
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→ **For** the first time in our survey history, we included questions that allowed us to perform more detailed segmentation of content across the six distinct persona types included in our survey: small business influencers, mid-market influencers, and enterprise influencers, and small business decision makers, mid-market decision makers, and enterprise decision makers (Figures 23–28).

We believe these high-level persona maps can provide invaluable information for technology marketers engaged in content planning; however, it's important to consider that these are general persona maps. We always recommend marketers perform their own detailed persona work specific to their unique audiences, solutions, and products when engaged in content planning.

### SMALL BUSINESS INFLUENCERS: MAPPING CONTENT TO SALES CYCLE



**FIGURE 23:** In which phase of the sales cycle do you find these asset types most helpful? Small business influencers.

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#### Content Mapped to Persona Types

#### BEST PRACTICES FOR 2014

→ While some of the nuances between these six persona content maps are slight, some are obvious, and we recommend a close look to gain all the value they present. However, we would like to offer up some of the more obvious differences from persona to persona.

### PRE-SALES

During pre-sales, small business influencers rely most heavily on infographics and video (both 34 percent). Small business decision makers, on the other hand, look more to blogs (39 percent). In contrast, mid-market buyers consume all content types in roughly equal amounts during pre-sales. But influencers

#### SMALL BUSINESS DECISION MAKERS: MAPPING CONTENT TO SALES CYCLE

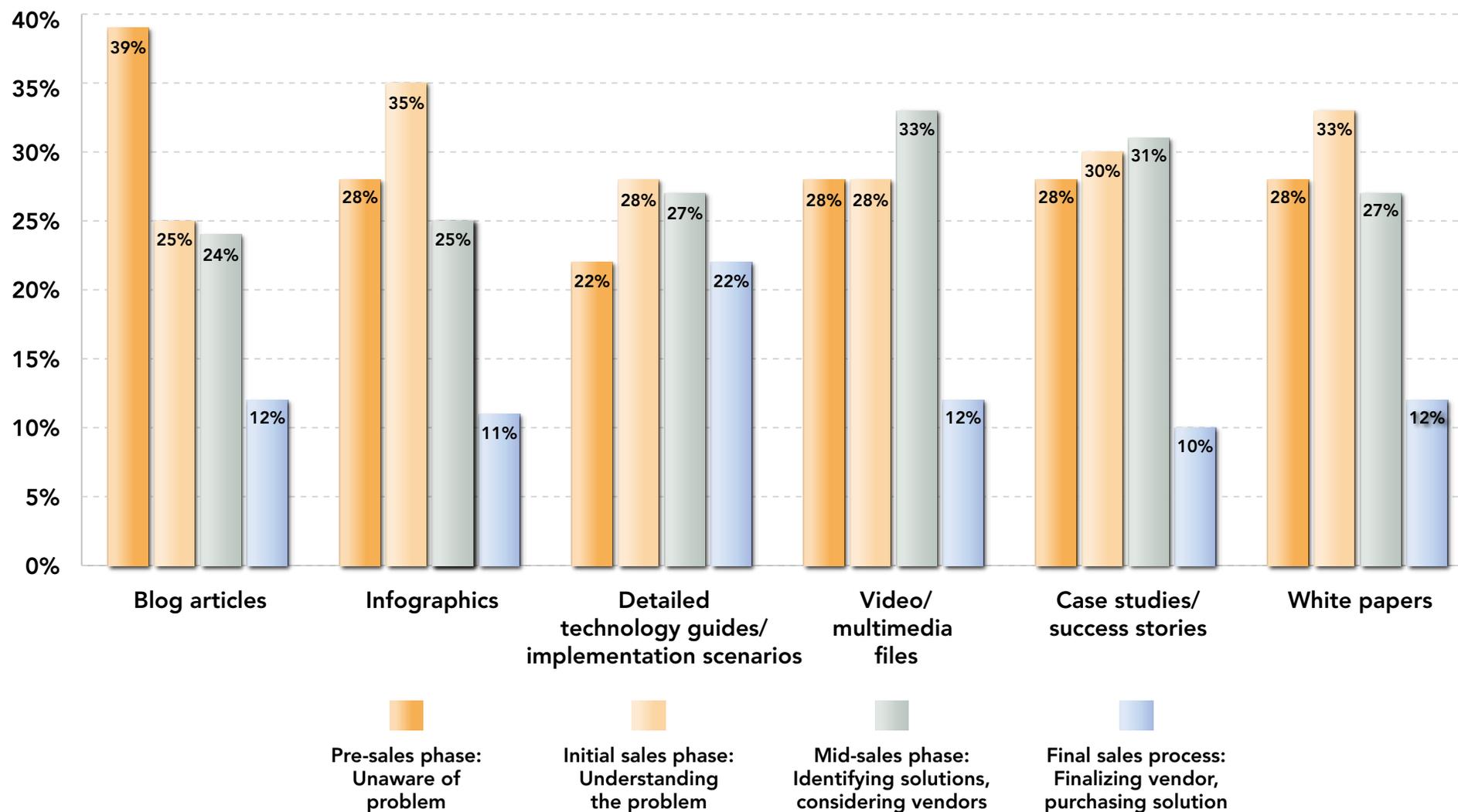


FIGURE 24: In which phase of the sales cycle do you find these asset types most helpful? Small business decision makers.

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#### Content Mapped to Persona Types

#### BEST PRACTICES FOR 2014

→ in the mid-market consume content at greater rates than decision makers during this phase. Among enterprise buyers, influencers and decision makers both prefer blogs and white papers.

### INITIAL SALES

In the initial sales phase, small business buyers consume all content types at similar rates, though influencers have a particular preference for case studies (40 percent). Among the mid-market, white papers are now seen as especially helpful. But for mid-market influencers,

MID-MARKET INFLUENCERS: MAPPING CONTENT TO SALES CYCLE

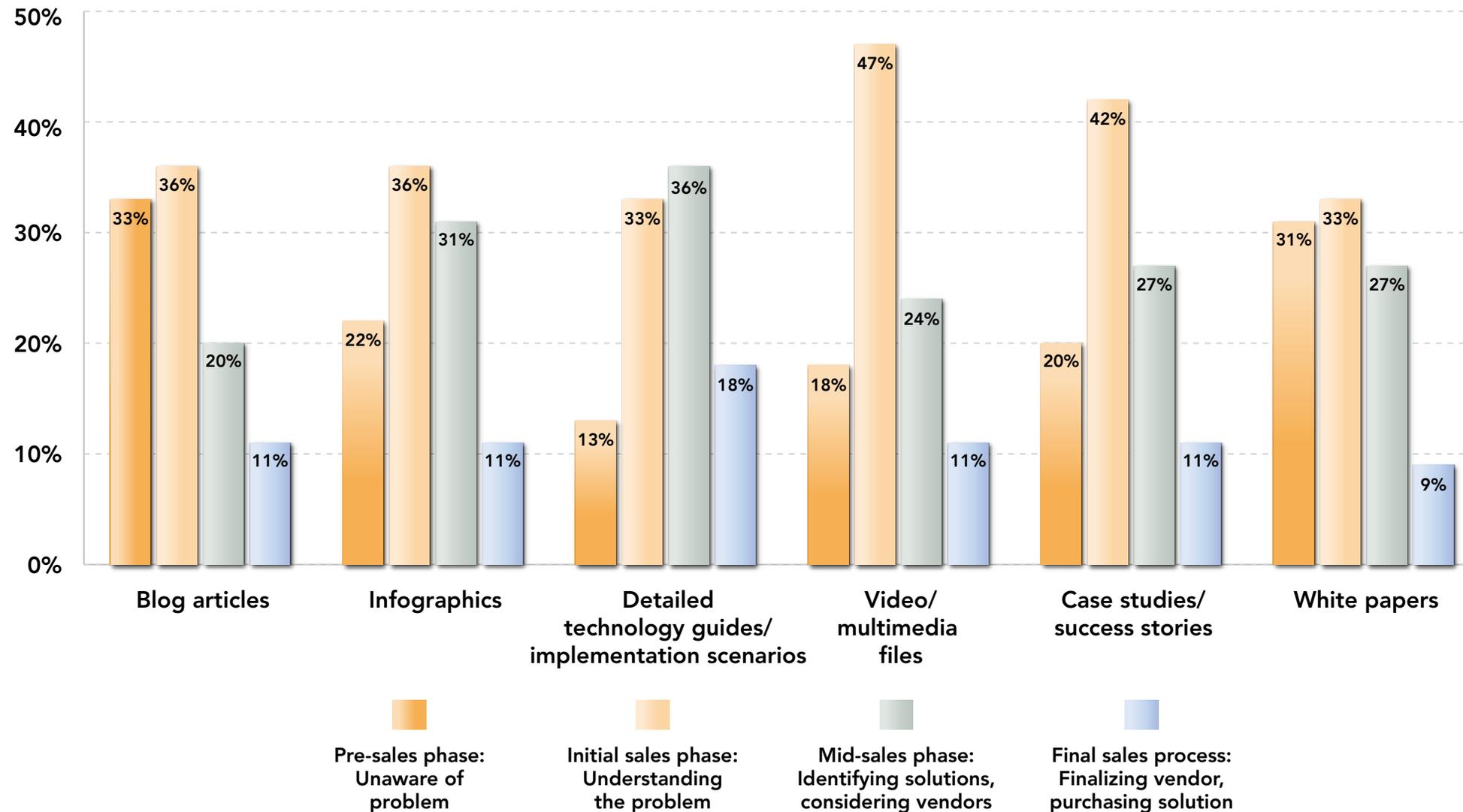


FIGURE 25: In which phase of the sales cycle do you find these asset types most helpful? Mid-market influencers.

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video and case studies are just as valuable as white papers (all 43 percent). For enterprise influencers, video (47 percent) is now most helpful. In fact, video rates higher for enterprise influencers

during initial sales than any other content type across the sales cycle and across personas.

### MID-MARKET DECISION MAKERS: MAPPING CONTENT TO SALES CYCLE

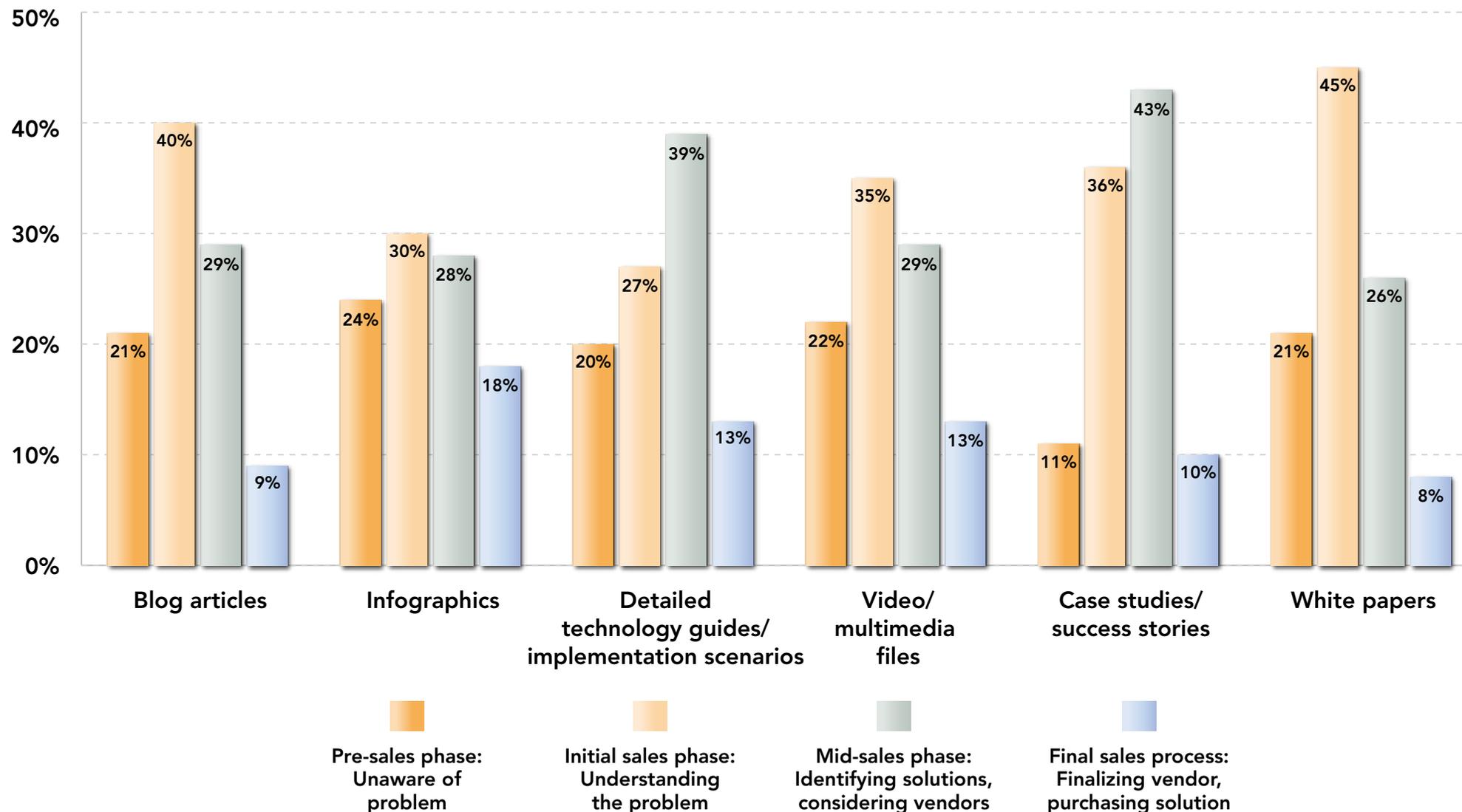


FIGURE 26: In which phase of the sales cycle do you find these asset types most helpful? Mid-market decision makers.

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### MID-SALES

By mid-sales, small business influencers find blogs (36 percent) especially helpful, while small business decision makers have increased their interest in video (33 percent). Mid-market influencers are now finding all content types slightly less useful,

but mid-market decision makers are still interested in case studies (43 percent) and technology guides (39 percent). Enterprise decision makers are turning to all content types at about the same rate they did during initial sales; but enterprise influencers are relying on most content types quite a bit less.

### ENTERPRISE INFLUENCERS: MAPPING CONTENT TO SALES CYCLE

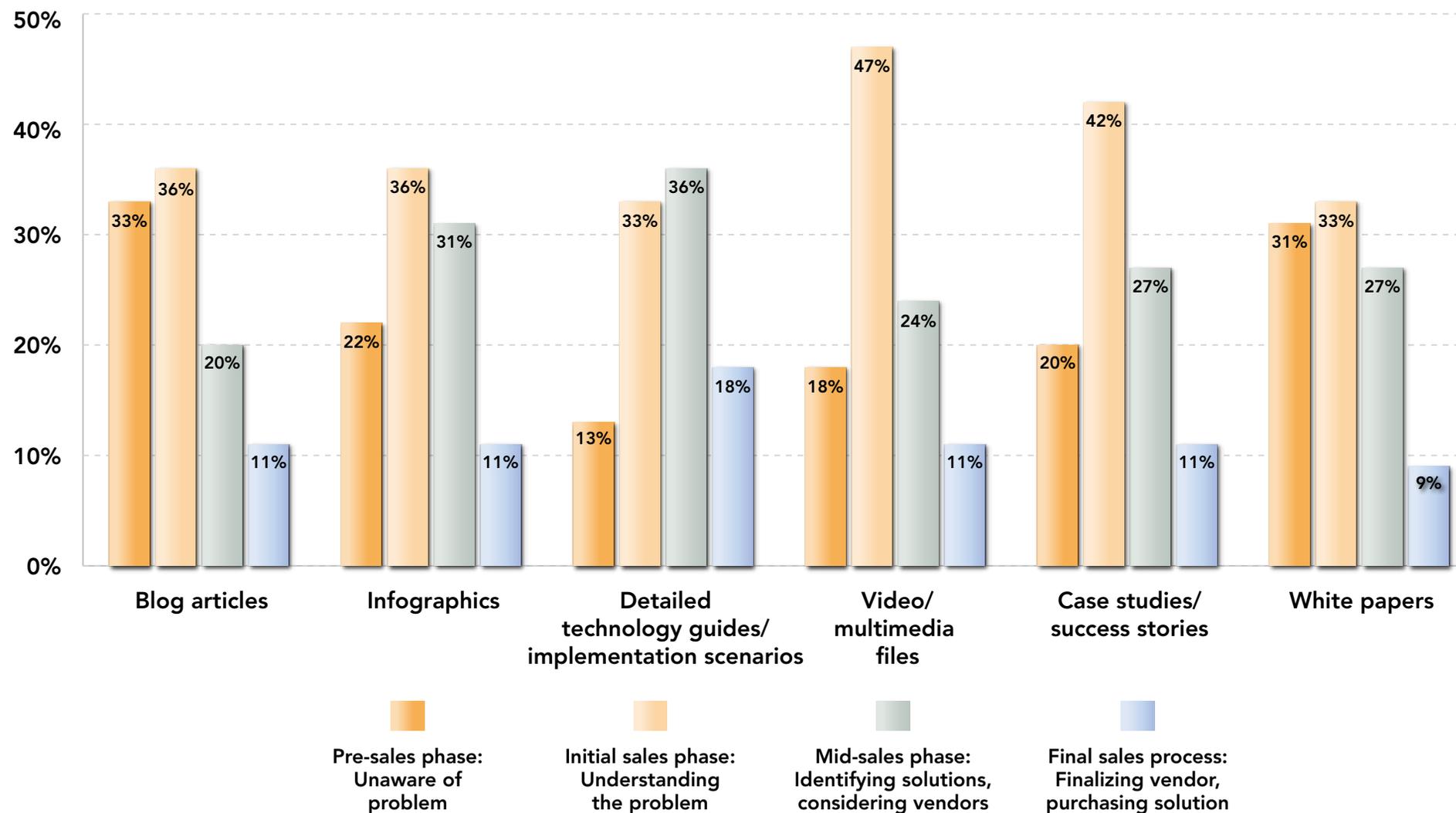


FIGURE 27: In which phase of the sales cycle do you find these asset types most helpful? Enterprise influencers

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### FINAL SALES

During the final sales process, small business decision makers still rely fairly heavily on technology guides (22 percent), as do mid-market influencers. Enterprise decision makers look to both technology guides and infographics (both 22 percent) during this phase.



For the first time, we segmented content used in the sales cycle across six distinct persona types.

#### ENTERPRISE INFLUENCERS: MAPPING CONTENT TO SALES CYCLE

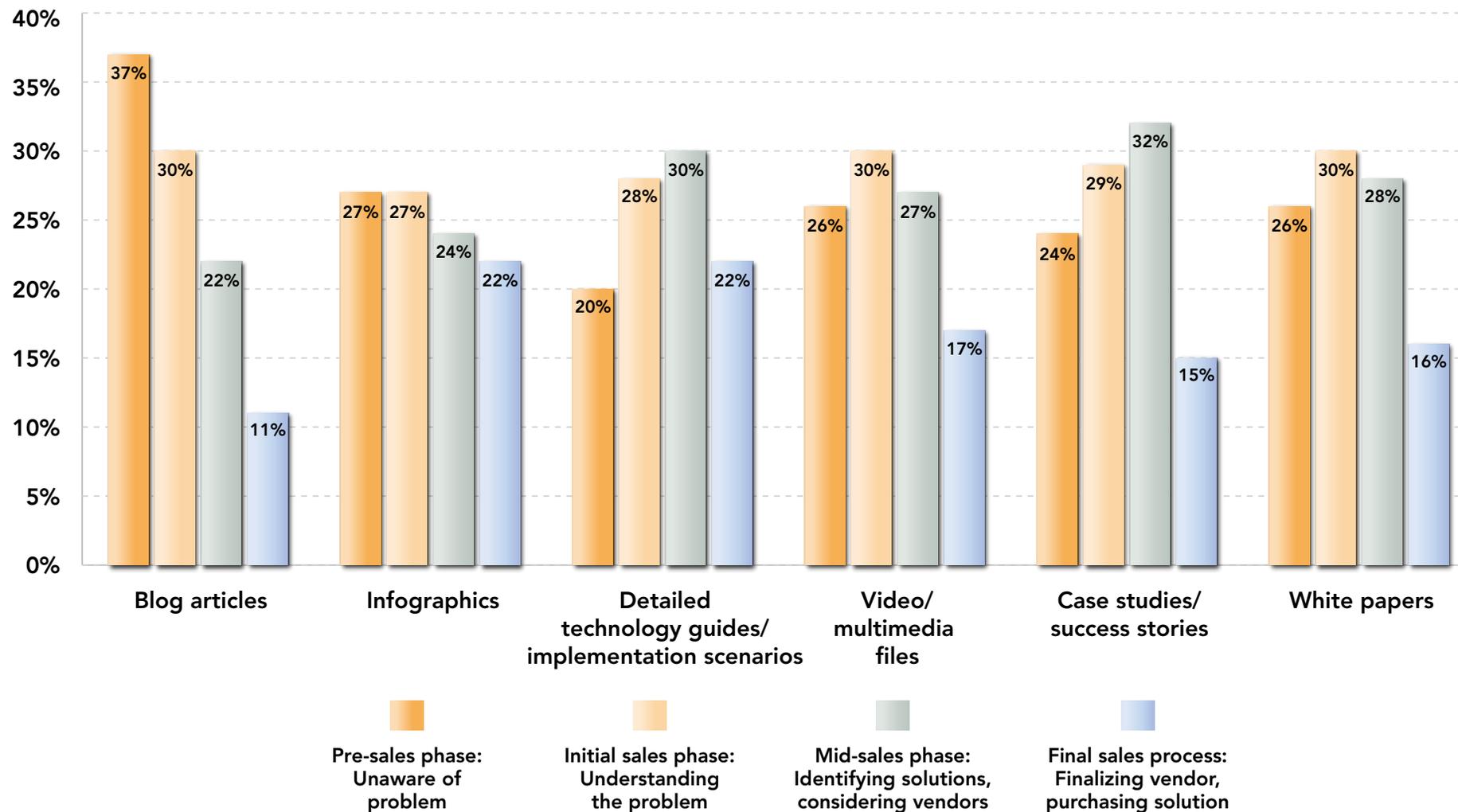


FIGURE 28: In which phase of the sales cycle do you find these asset types most helpful? Enterprise influencers.

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→ **Here** are key takeaways from the *Eccolo Media 2014 B2B Technology Content Survey Report* that marketers can use to optimize their marketing planning and execution in 2014.

### MAP CONTENT TO THE BUYER'S JOURNEY

It's probably no surprise that, in general, technology buyers rely on content most during initial sales, somewhat less in pre-sales and mid-sales, and quite a bit less during final sales. But there can be significant differences in what a small business influencer prefers during pre-sales, say, and what an enterprise decision maker relies on in mid-sales.

For example, white papers are considered helpful across personas and across sales phases. But small business decision makers find blogs especially valuable during pre-sales. And video rates higher for enterprise influencers during initial sales than any other content type across the sales cycle and across personas.

Marketers who fully understand which content types buyers use at each phase of the sales cycle will be better equipped to leverage their content and maximize the success of their marketing programs.

### LEVERAGE LINKEDIN, BUT DON'T IGNORE FACEBOOK

Right now, our survey respondents expect LinkedIn to be more valuable when it comes to finding content that influences a



Don't create more content, create better content. Focus on quality, relevance and variety, rather than volume.

purchase process. If a social strategy makes sense for your business, consider implementing through that channel. However, if you have a presence on Facebook that's driving the results you're looking for, don't stop. Add LinkedIn and see how they both perform. Both these companies are working hard to create the perception that they're good for business information, so ride their coattails where you can.

### DON'T CREATE MORE CONTENT, CREATE SMARTER CONTENT

Each year since 2011, the influence of each content type has slightly declined. Why? Three years ago, content marketing was the hot new trend and marketers were dazzled by the volume and variety of assets. Now, however, they have become much more discriminating, less apt to find content influential just because it's available. Don't create more content, create better content. Focus on quality, relevance, and variety, rather than volume. Think about core assets that articulate your value proposition for your specific audience and then repurpose the heck out of it across formats and distribution channels.

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## → KEEP WHAT WORKS, AND EXPLORE WHAT'S NEW

Our research makes clear that technology buyers continue to rely on traditional collateral types such as case studies, brochures, and technology guides. In particular, white papers reign supreme as the most used and influential asset type throughout the purchasing process. In addition, 31 percent of our respondents consume customer magazines/ publications.

Still, while traditional collateral types are widely used, technology buyers increasingly turn to newer formats such as infographics, e-books, blogs, video, and podcasts. Marketers must find the right balance between the old and the new. Those who neglect traditional content in favor of newer formats risk losing out on some of the most efficient and effective ways of reaching their target audiences. Those, however, who focus solely on the traditional types will also miss out on opportunities to reach new customers.

## TAP INTO THE PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF INTERACTIVITY

Respondents perceive interactive content as more influential, and more than two-thirds will interact with content to receive additional information from vendors. A good way to increase the

influence of your content is to include interactive components, such as hyperlinks and embedded audio, video, or graphic elements. Think about how interactivity can be used to take users more deeply into the buyer's journey. Remember, however, that interactivity must enhance the user experience. Buyers, for example, won't always click through a link if they're not certain where it will take them, or whether the link is relevant.

## DON'T STOP AFTER THE PURCHASE

Finally, our survey reveals that respondents find value in vendor content (white papers, case studies, and technology guides) after their purchase is complete. Deepen your customer relationships by extending your content strategy to after-sale communications. Be sure you understand how post-sales needs differ from pre-sale, then leverage targeted communications to effectively pump up customer loyalty, up-selling, and cross-selling opportunities.

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→ **We** would like to acknowledge the participation of the following team members for their efforts in creating the *Eccolo Media 2014 B2B Technology Content Survey Report*: Eric Schoeniger, Kristyl Karg, Lorie Loe, Eric Pfeiffer, Jennifer Whipple, Stan Mims, and Rebecca Mildwurm.

## ABOUT ECCOLO MEDIA

Eccolo Media specializes in content strategy and planning and content development for some of the world's best-known technology companies. An agency of exceptional writers, Eccolo combines deep experience with ongoing research to identify and apply best practices for producing remarkable content. Founded in 2007, Eccolo Media is headquartered in San Francisco, California, and fulfills a wide range of strategic needs throughout the Americas and EMEA.

Visit our Web site at [www.eccolomedia.com](http://www.eccolomedia.com).

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Sprocket Media helps its clients build content marketing programs that get prospects to take action with relevant, rich, timely content that engages their communities. The company develops, designs, and produces custom publications, monetizes these publications through advertising programs and digital marketing services, and amplifies its clients' content marketing programs through social media.



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